Gilbert Sevens

Harley Poors

Sketches

THREE SEVENS

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A Detective Story

By

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Three Sevens

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	"Solitary"	11
II.	Providence Aiding	21
III.	Headquarters	29
IV.	By Process of Law	38
V.	"Your Work!"	48
VI.	Just and Unjust	58
VII.	The Promise	63
VIII.	In San Pedro	74
IX.	Old Rags!	83
X.	Sancho	94
XI.	Live Freight	104
XII.	The Second Version	112
XIII.	Ship and Beacon	117
XIV.	Aunt Katherine	124
XV.	Quarry	131
XVI.	Mere Rumors	138
XVII.	Gathering Storm	148
XVIII.	Toward Sundown	156

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX.	The Lull	164
XX.	The Magnet	170
XXI.	Parley	176
XXII.	The Underworld	184
XXIII.	The Letter	191
XXIV.	In the Throes	202
XXV.	Ghosts	213
XXVI.	Right and Left	224
XXVII.	Tigers' Den	234
XXVIII.	Twelve	242

THREE SEVENS

CHAPTER I

"SOLITARY"

IT mattered not at all to Craig that he had at least another ten years of prison ahead of him, nor that at least another month of this unexpired term would have to be passed here in the "cooler." He had already considered these facts through long hours, and had found them as unproductive as stones. But the cat was a brand-new fact. He stroked her fur. He tickled her under the chin. In a sort of tremulous delight he wondered how she got here—where she came from—who owned her.

At this last phase of his happy speculation it was as if his mind gave a slight start of surprise. Did she come as a heritage, so to speak, from Chi Slim?

Here in San Pedro Prison, the punishment cells were a row of boiler-iron boxes, each of them approximately a five-foot hollow cube—six of them in all, ranged along one side of a dark subcellar. In each cell there was an iron door with two openings in it—one near the top, through which the guard could flash his light, when he made his rounds, and thus see what the inmate of the cell was doing; and the other at the bottom, through which things could be pushed, such as food and water pans, without the door being opened.

They took no chances with a prisoner, once he was in his cell. There he stayed. The door wasn't opened until his time was up, and then there would

be plenty of guards on hand to handle him—if he still required it, which wasn't likely. He could groan. He could claim that he was sick. He could plead until he was hoarse. He could hammer on it, as had occasionally happened, until he was a senseless pulp. That door remained shut.

It did, that is, unless the inmate died. And that was what had happened to Chi Slim. So they took Chi out and put Craig in.

"Welcome to our club!"

Craig knew all about it before he had been in the cell five minutes. The other cells were occupied, all of them, and there was a waiting list, whence the allusion to the club. The prisoners talked when the guard was away. And they told Craig that he ought to feel honored. He not only had the cell with the biggest rivets in the floor, thus making it impossible either to sit down or lie down without torture, but he was the successor to an aristocrat.

That was right, too. For Chi Slim, notwithstanding his youth, had been one of the most famous crooks in the United States. And, more than that, he had died untamed.

As Craig stroked the cat's soft fur he wondered at the hidden side of Chi Slim's nature that had made it possible for him to tame the creature, win its trust. For Chi Slim had been bad—all bad. He had been a thief and a killer. He was never worse than when the odds were against him. As in prison, for example, where, twice, he had maimed his guards and made clean get-aways.

Chi had been famous as a jail breaker, scoffing at the trial judge on the bench, mocking the wardens, shrieking vengeance at the guards who mistreated him when they thought they had him safe, and then somehow or other, getting away in spite of them all.

Of course he had never, or hardly ever, accom-

plished his get-aways single-handed. Chi had been a man of many friends. It would have been hard to find a prison in the United States where some friend of his was not, or some friend of a friend equally ready to aid and abet any plan Chi Slim might evolve, from the murder of the warden to the bribery of a guard.

But San Pedro had got him and held him—right here in this same boiler-iron box, from the day of his reception to this, his last and cleanest get-away of all.

Craig meditated all this as he toyed with the cat, and prayed fervently that she wouldn't leave him. It wasn't surprising that a cat should have found her way into the dark subcellar. The place was swarming with rats. And even the rats had been useful in giving the inmates of the dark cells something to think about and talk about. It was almost like work to get a rat into a cell and then to get it out again. It was a guarantee against madness, anyway. But that a cat should have picked out Chi Slim for a companion, that was surprising.

That the cat hadn't visited the other cells Craig made sure. No, she was Chi Slim's cat. Chi had made blasphemous recommendations to the other prisoners neither to touch the animal nor speak to her nor attempt to feed her. His! His! And, finally, the feline had accepted Chi's proprietorship.

Why not? He himself was a man cat, as ever was. Later on, not much later, Craig was to discover evidence that Chi Slim might have done a little rat-catching on his own account. Like that, perhaps, had he first come into pussy's good graces.

But, first of all, there came that other discovery. Not a discovery; a revelation!

It came just as a hiss here and there from the other cells warned the six inmates of the "punishment block" that a guard was at hand. All the time

that Craig was hearing the stealthy grating of the key in the outer lock, and the slight sibilance of hinges as the door of the subcellar was opened, and the later sibilance as the guard approached in his felt slippers, pausing before each iron cell to flash his light into it, he sat there blinded by another sort and greater light.

The cat, by this time, was against his knees, stretched out luxuriously on the iron floor that was torture to him, while Craig continued to caress her and prayed that the guard wouldn't see—wouldn't suspect.

He raised his face. The light that flashed in upon him was like a bath of cold fire. It came so unexpectedly, although he had been expecting it. He had longed for it a while back. But now he had dreaded it and would have dreaded it even if it hadn't blinded him.

"Father, have mercy," he said piously.

It seemed as if the light were still there even after it was gone, and after the guard himself was gone, locking the door of the subcellar back of him and climbing up the stone stairs to the guardroom at the top of the stairs.

For, as Craig was running his fingers gently over the cat's neck he had felt a roughness. A scar, perhaps; an unhealed wound. And he had avoided the spot. But he had found a similar roughness back of the animal's ears.

Then he had gently investigated. That was strange. The cat was wearing some sort of a collar.

It was right then that he got his revelation. It all came to him in a flash. Prison will do that for men—turn them into half-wits or develop them into quick and subtle thinkers. And in that flash he understood why Chi Slim had tamed the cat, and let it be known, no doubt, in certain other quarters of the

prison that the cat visited him, and thus might be used as a courier of sorts.

The cat was wearing a collar, all right. It was a collar of five fine steel saws.

There was one good thing about this club of darkness to which Craig had been elected against his will. Its membership included no stool pigeons, no informers. And only six members in all. There would be no saw work without their knowing it. Their ears were as nicely tuned to the small noises of this living tomb in which they dwelt as were the ears of the rats themselves. But this did not mean betrayal.

"Boys," whispered Craig. "Is he gone?"

There was a longish silence, while the others listened.

"He's gone," said Jim Bartow, of No. 1 cell—which was nearest the foot of the stairs. "I heard him close the door at the top."

"Because," said Craig, "I have something to tell you."

And he did tell them.

"The saws came from Solly Wells," whispered some one from the other end of the cellar. "Solly's in the hospital, expectin' to croak. He didn't know Chi'd beat him to it."

There was a riot of subdued excitement. All speech took place in whispers, for there was no telling when some sneak of a guard might not take the trouble to come down and listen at the keyhole, but it was loud enough for the brethren of the lodge. Some of them lamented that the saws had fallen into the hands of a greenhorn, but the general temper was high.

"How'll I use them?" Craig inquired.

It was Jim Bartow who instructed him. First of all, he was to take his time. He wasn't to get excited. Otherwise, he would be spoiling those saws, one after the other, and nothing would be accom-

plished. He could get one hand through the top hole in his door, couldn't he? Yes. Well, he could start sawing there.

"And oil it with your soup," some one whispered.

"Yeh," said Bartow, "and paint a sign board so as the guard won't overlook nothing! He'll have to do the job cold and dry—and, at that, this boiler iron ought to cut like cheese."

Craig set to work. Overhead and all about, San Pedro Prison was a factory. Like a factory it began its day, and that was signaled to those who dwelt in the darkness of the punishment block by certain signs and sounds. It was then that there came to them the muted whirring of the engine room and, fainter yet, the rumbling tremor of the westbound train. There were those among them with senses so fine that they could tell whether the train had stopped or not, whether it was going fast or slow. Then came the noon hour, with another shake rather than a sound, which meant that the prison whistle blew. Then night, with the finest tremor of all—that given off by the dynamos of the lighting plant.

But through all these other periods of the dark dial that was their only clock, came the intermittent visits of the guards—the whispered tread of the felt shoes, the blinding flash that was the light they hungered for and which could be so cruel.

There was one thing about this light ration served the men of the punishment block—it was blinding more or less to the guard, as well. He could peer well enough at the creature who cowered in the cell, or stared and swore; but he wasn't likely to see anything so fine and small as that lengthening streak, no wider than a fine black thread, that fell from a corner of the upper hole in the door of cell No. 3.

"You rat!" snarled Craig.

"I'll see that you get a week extra for that," said Copton, the guard.

It was because of Copton that Craig was in the dark cell. Copton, a week ago, had almost crushed in Craig's ribs for no special reason other than that he was in a bad humor, and Craig had struck him. He had whirled on him right out of the lockstep, lifted him with an uppercut to the chin, and dropped him with a jab to the stomach. And then Copton had done practice on Craig with his club.

But it wasn't because of all this that Craig had called Copton a rat. He had expected a lengthening of his sentence, and had needed it. Now, just one day more—two days.

He was following Bartow's advice. Slow work it was, and killing work. So the beaver gnaws a tree. So one of the big prison rats would draw water from a thick lead pipe. But, like beaver or rat—or a caged badger scratching forever at a knot hole, so this evolved animal of a man shoved forward his fine saw and drew it back again, shoved it forward, drew it back again. Not like cheese this boiler iron, certainly; but easy to cut, as such things go.

Whoever had furnished those saws to Solly Wells had not risked the great chance on inferior goods. Otherwise, moreover, Solly would never have sent them to Chi Slim. The saws were good saws.

Was the spirit of Chi Slim there directing Craig now? He often felt that this was so, for queer fancies come to a man who works in the dark. Half the time he felt that not only was Chi Slim's ghost there, but a whole regiment of other ghosts—the ghosts of those who had preceded him in this cell, and in San Pedro generally. For Craig had seen things since coming to San Pedro that made him sick—sick as he hadn't been even with the big sickness of his arrest, his trial, his conviction.

It was this latter element of his experience that was with him all the time, even when the ghosts were there—one might almost say especially when the ghosts were there. For it was this that vibrated in Craig's mind, day and night:

Now that he knew about the horrors of San Pedro—— *Saw! Saw!*

Now that he knew there were some men here who ought to be free—— *Scrape! Scrape!*

Now that he knew that he himself, his immortal soul, had already atoned its sin a thousand times over—— *Rasp! Rasp!*

His fingers were bleeding. His knees were lacerated. His muscles were become but a part of some machine that was killing him. But none the less, Craig had that vision of a bigger thing to sustain him—a wider liberty, a greater joy, a more stupendous prize. For he had joined the small number of the great.

Who were the great? They were the men who, like himself, had fallen into the cruel, huge power that drives the world ahead, and who are thus marked to pass on that power to others, as Napoleon did, as Cæsar did, and Moses.

The saw he was using snapped close to his fingers, as if this tempered steel itself were unable to stand the strain. It was the third saw that had snapped like that, despite his infinite pains and the profane recommendations of his brethren. But Craig didn't worry. Not greatly. He would have enough saws to see him through. He knew he would. This was too great a thing to fail because of a mere saw or two.

Else, why had he been sent to San Pedro, of all prisons, when there was a man at the head of it by the name of Green? And this man Green, whom he had scarcely seen, and who had scarcely looked at him, so

closely woven into the scheme of Providence thus far revealed, didn't know anything about it? Or, did Green know? It didn't matter.

Providence was running this. It was Providence helping him to extend that invisible cut—invisible to the dull-witted guards who came from top hole to bottom; and when this work should be complete, could he doubt but that Providence likewise would show him the way?

Not that Craig failed to receive much advice along these lines also from his fellows of the dark lodge. They were all willing to help.

Jim Bartow, cell No. 1, volunteered to throw soup in the guard's face, thus creating a diversion until Craig could get him from behind.

Whitey, cell No. 2, had a stiletto made from a wire he had once removed from the rim of a tin plate and had since managed, the Lord knows how, to keep concealed through numerous searchings and changes of raiment. He thought he could hold the guard's attention better than Bartow. Anyhow, Craig could have the weapon the moment he was out of his cell.

In cell No. 4 was a half-wit who sang, all the time that he wasn't weeping; and in cell No. 5 was Bangor—a six-footer who had once sailed his own trawler—eager to help, but reduced by a fever.

It was from cell No. 6, the last in the row, that Craig got most of his counsel—got this by a word here and a word there, and in long silences, as if the inmate of cell No. 6 were speaking to him in a sort of vocal Morse. For the inmate of cell No. 6 was an elderly yegg, or safeblower, named Eddie; and Eddie had spent most of his long life in prisons, had talked a lot with chaplains and reformers, had read many books, had become, in short, a philosopher and sage.

"A great opportunity," said Eddie softly, when

he was sure that all except Craig and himself were asleep. "Oh, I do hope, sir, that you will make the most of it. A chance to do good!"

This from Eddie who had blown safes, and shot at the citizens of villages on dark nights, and was down here in the punishment cells now for calling Warden Green bad names in the presence of visitors.

"Saw! Saw!" And Craig was almost through.

CHAPTER II

PROVIDENCE AIDING

THERE had been a change or two in the population of the cells since the work began. Bartow was gone. So was the half-wit of cell No. 4. And these changes, while regrettable to the extent that they caused some doubt and consequent delay, were useful in bringing the calendar up to date, so to speak. For some time there had been a discussion as to whether the following day would be Friday or Saturday. The newcomers decided it.

Not only would the next day be Saturday, and hence the next day Sunday; but the following day also would be a holiday—Monday.

"What holiday?" asked Craig.

"Lincoln's Birthday, you crazy stiff," laughed the man who had taken the half-wit's deserted lodgment.

There came a groan from cell No. 1. A soft voice succeeded it:

"Mah name's Geawge Washington, but I guess no Lincoln ain't goin' to set me free."

Then, in the blackness and the humming silence of the place, Craig felt the door of his iron box yield, snap open. Himself he found staggering forward until he almost lost his balance. He was as dizzy as a man standing on the edge of a precipice—a precipice imagined rather than seen. It was the wall of the cellar that saved him from falling completely.

"He's out," thrilled the whisper.

"Tommy!"

That was his prison name—Thomas Masters. Not

even the judge who had committed him, not even the chaplain, knew that his name was Craig. That, at least, he had kept untarnished out of his past. He had dreamed of the time when he could use that name again.

"Hey, Tommy!"

There were other whispers. There for a space, the subcellar was shaking with a vibration like that of a passing train or the engines of the power house. Then Craig was getting the upper hand of himself and of the crowd.

"Every one shut up," he said; "and let me think."

He had plenty of time to think. It would be almost an hour yet before the night guard made his first round. So he gave himself to thought, panted back his strength, and suppled himself there in the darkness. Then he pawed his way down the line to the iron box wherein Eddie was locked like a thing of great price, and he and Eddie talked—in the all but silent lip speech that the others couldn't hear.

"Yes," said Eddie. "Meet him at the door, and then, if there is a slip——"

"There'll be no slip."

"Many a good man has said as much, then slipped. If there is a slip, you'll still have a chance to slam the door and make the guardroom at the top of the stairs——"

"There were three guards there the day they brought me down."

"There'll be that many there, now, if not more," said Eddie, to whom the prison was an open book. "They like to assemble there, especially Saturdays at this hour, for their evening pinochle. That's your chance. They'll be playing pinochle, and you can grab a gun."

"I don't want to kill any one if it can be helped," said Craig.

" 'Tis a thought that'll bring you luck," said Eddie. "But the numbers will be on your side. They're no marksmen, and will be afraid of shooting each other. You can bluff the gatekeeper——"

"If I get that far. But I'm telling you, Eddie——"

"Tut! Tut!" said Eddie. Or, at least, he dropped a silence to that effect. "Yourself first."

"But it's not that that I've been working for," said Craig. "I'd feel like a hound, if I beat it and left the others."

"A thought that'll bring you luck," said Eddie. "But, once you're outside, there are the messages you can write, the politicians you can see, so's mebbe San Pedro will be reformed."

"Hey, Tommy," came the voice of him who had announced that Monday was Lincoln's Birthday, "turn me loose with a gun. I'm a killer, I am."

And Whitey, from cell No. 2, was begging him to come and get his wire stiletto. Whitey had cherished his stiletto so long that he loved it greatly, spoke of its virtues. He said that it was lucky, that he had done things to it that would lead the point of it straight to any stiff's heart.

Through all this—not that it was noisy, not that it was obstreperous, for they were all listening as men listen when their lives depend on small sounds and the significance thereof—Craig and Eddie debated and quested out into the great unknown and came back again, to the very present problem of handling the night guard when that worthy should arrive.

Finally Craig said:

"Eddie, have I got your sacred oath?"

"By all that's holy!"

"Because I'll need help after a while. And, whatever we do, we'll be trying to do good."

" 'Tis a thought that'll bring you luck."

"Sh!"

Some one had heard, or thought that he had heard, the door open at the top of the stairs. It wasn't time yet for the night guard to begin his rounds. But you never could tell. Perhaps the guard would be coming early, eager to get back and sit in at the opening round of the pinochle game.

As Craig crept away from Eddie's cell and found the wall in the darkness, then crept along this wall in the direction of the door by which the guard would enter this sunless hole of human misery, he felt as if he had died and were emerging from the grave, going up for judgment. What would that judgment be?

A rat squeaked, and the cold sweat was on his brow. He stood still. He forced himself to breathe deeply. He sought steadiness from the rocks and mortar of the wall against which he leaned. Again he moved forward.

"Hey, Tommy!"

The call brought out his sense of leadership.

"Not another word from any one," he whispered, "until I give permission."

"Are you goin' to leave us here?" whined the killer.

No answer. But there was a response in Craig's mind. He wouldn't leave them here. What good would it do him if he did leave them here? Would he enjoy himself if he did—trailing a memory of them around with him as long as he lived, in the bright springs, the wide summers of the plains, the colored autumns of the woods, the blue and snowy winters—the memory of these who had but a single season?

No! He would remain, or die, or kill in the name of justice, rather than desert these comrades in misery.

Like that he came to the closed and locked iron door at the foot of the stairs. There he bent his head and listened. For a long time he could hear nothing. Then, gradually, he was aware of a slight

sound of breathing. Not his own breathing. He timed himself. The breathing came from the other side of the door.

The guard was already there—spying, listening. And then, as Craig drew back, he could hear the guard stealthily slip the bolt, begin cautiously to open the door. Not only in Craig's heart, but as if in every other sinew and fiber of him, he felt the prophetic thrill of predestined victory.

It was the feeling that was in him when he shot out his left arm and got a strangle hold on the guard from the back. using his right hand for the more dangerous, but scarcely more important, work of twisting the guard's own right arm up and back. The guard had been armed with flash light and truncheon. These he dropped. Also, he wore a gun—a pistol in a holster against his breast. But not from the first moment had the guard had the slightest chance to fight back at all.

He resisted, but he resisted blindly. It was plain that sheer terror was all that spurred him on. He couldn't have known what had him, even—what sort of a terror had been distilled from the darkness. For, with most men, superstition is always there just under the surface as close and potent as a nightmare during sleep.

He saw Craig standing over him.

"Well, for——" the guard began.

"Not a word above a whisper," said Craig.

The guard scrambled up to a sitting position, was for jumping to his feet. He felt a hand, not very heavy but firm, on the top of his head.

"Stay where you are. Undress!"

"The hell——"

"You're under orders. Quick!"

All the time that the guard was pulling off his coat, then his vest, then the straps of his holster, his cap,

the felt shoes, relieving himself of every last detail of his accouterment, he was staring into the muzzle of his own gun. He was like a man who was hypnotized.

Even so, it probably wasn't the deadly danger of that pointed gun that awed him most. It was the presence of the impossible. Something had happened that he couldn't understand. He looked up and down the punishment block—the six iron boxes, like safes, where horror was stored. He looked curiously at the sawed door of cell No. 3.

"Now, get up," said Craig, "and raise your hands, and walk down to No. 6."

There was the beginning of a rustle and a subdued riot of emotion from the cages.

"Hurry up, Tommy!"

"Tommy, let me out, quick!"

Craig spoke from the side of his mouth.

"I'm going to let you all out of the cells as soon as I can. But you'll have to wait a while. Get me? This is no ordinary break."

Maybe there was a touch of wonder on the prisoners as well as on the captured guard. What was it all about?

It was Eddie's cell that Craig opened first, and Eddie came crawling out of this like an ancient rat that had just been changed into a man and was overcome by the miracle and also somewhat by the joke of it. Eddie had a pointed, rather ratlike face when it came to the contour, but his wonderstruck smile was human, and the lines of suffering in his grizzled cheeks. Like Lazarus coming out of the tomb, had Lazarus been old, dressed in prison rags, badly in need of a barber.

He seized the revolver Craig handed him, and his eyes showed bright comprehension and appreciation.

Eddie was at home in prison affairs, even in affairs like this.

The guard recovered his voice to some extent.

"I got a family, boys."

"We ain't going to hurt you," whispered Eddie. "Get into the cell, you bum. We ain't going to hurt no one; are we, Mr. Masters?"

Somehow, Eddie had got the idea that Craig was a gentleman. And, when Craig answered that no, they weren't going to hurt any one if that could be helped, Eddie said that 'twas this thought that would bring them luck.

Himself, Craig hoped so. He was going to need luck—all the luck in the world. He was telling himself so, and telling the darkness so, and infinity in general, as he took the gun from Eddie, gave him the final instructions, and started for the head of the stairs.

The luck had run all right so far. The guard was in the cell and locked up. Eddie had shown himself a man to be trusted. As for Craig, he had on the guard's uniform—not much of a disguise in his own unclipped and unshaven state, but it would have to do. And he had that deadly weapon in his hand—a badge of power to transform almost any man, even a convict, into something of a commanding general.

"Send me luck!" whispered Craig silently, from his heart.

He repeated the petition at every step—stone steps—of the stairway leading to the guardroom up there where Eddie had told him there might be as many as half a dozen guards assembled for the Saturday night pinochle.

In any case, he got the luck he wanted. There were the half dozen guards that Eddie had said would be there, and their game was already under way. They were so intent on it that they never even looked up

as Craig pushed the door open, and entered. His stolen felt shoes had made no sound. Even his heart was as if silent—normal; and his breathing was soft.

Craig stood there for a full three seconds surveying them in that stark and white-washed room flooded with raw, artificial light. Then one of the guards, glancing in his direction, started to move or speak. All this in the most fleeting interval. And Craig spoke to them.

"Move or cheep," he said, "and I'll kill you—so help me God!"

CHAPTER III

HEADQUARTERS

JUST a whisper, but it was enough. He had the drop on them. He not only had the drop on them, but the guards, anything but intellectual giants in other respects, were pretty good judges of certain men in certain circumstances. They knew that this man meant what he said.

"Lift your hands," said Craig. "Steady!" He himself was as steady as concrete, but his nerves and his brain were nimble. He could see in all directions at once—or felt as if he could. "Now," said he, "get up slow and easy—that's right—and face the wall."

They obeyed. They were not cowards precisely. It was just Mr. Death pointing his finger at them, that was all. Not all of them were brave men, either—one in particular. This was Copton, the guard responsible for the break that had sent Craig to the dark cells, *after* a session in the hospital. Copton had gone flabby and white. He shook. To look at Copton was to see that he believed all this to be a measure of vengeance aimed solely against himself. Copton was sure of this when Craig spoke commandingly to him.

"Copton," said Craig, "step backward to the table and put your gun on it, then your billy, then turn your pockets wrong side out—quick!"

Copton jumped. He did as he was ordered, as quickly as his flabby nerves would permit him to, expecting a shot in the liver from one moment to the next. But he picked up a bit of courage when Craig

spoke to him next. And it was just as well that he did, too. For, even now, there wasn't a second to be lost—no telling at what moment some other guard might come drifting in, or the principal keeper himself, thus spoiling everything.

"And now, Copton," said Craig, "disarm the others. Holsters off with the guns! Billies and handcuffs with them."

He had picked on Copton because the man was so deadly frightened that there was no danger of his disobeying. Just then, Copton would have murdered his own grandmother, if so ordered. He was that kind. And plus this fear of his, was his gratitude for being permitted to live yet a little longer. He had mistreated Craig. Now Craig had him in his power. Copton was sick with fright.

There was a guard named Tweed—a big, young man, without much sense, with something of the blind courage of a young buffalo. Craig saw, just in time, a premonitory flexing of Tweed's arms.

"Steady, there, Tweed," he said.

He made Copton handcuff Tweed right there, with his hands still up. But there were signs of wavering elsewhere. So Craig made Copton take a gun from the pile and drill it on his comrades, and the guards were more afraid of this frightened renegade with a gun, one would have said, than they were of Craig himself.

As a matter of fact, as measured by the ticking of a watch, all that had transpired since Craig's first appearance here in the room upstairs, must have been at breathless speed, leisurely but fast, as is the way of big events, like the piling into each other of two racing locomotives, or the fall of a big redwood tree. And the danger was all over by the time that "Eddie, the Yegg" came crawling up from the subcellar.

Eddie quietly took one of the piled-up guns.

"I counted the hundred you told me to, sir," he said in his prison whisper. Craig had ordered Eddie to wait that long.

"Good," said Craig. "Now, take the gun from Copton. And"—he raised his voice slightly—"I'll remind you gentlemen that no one will be hurt if you obey orders. One false move, and we'll bag the lot of you."

The six guards were marched with Eddie, sidewise, at their head and Craig at the rear down into the subcellar. There, Copton aiding, these keepers also were stripped—five of them, not including Copton. For Craig had other work he wanted Copton to do—work in which Copton would need his uniform. And Copton was willing. His gratitude at being spared was now greater than his fear that he wouldn't be spared, and he would have murdered all five, and the one already in the cell, had Craig but spoken the word.

But now Craig turned out the feverish Bangor, and put two of the guards in that small box which had been Bangor's sick room for upward of a week. Then he delivered an oath to George Washington, and George swore, while the other convicts, those still in the cells, uttered oaths of another sort and made obscene jests at the keepers' expense, until Craig spoke to them.

Even in this short time Craig had grown in power other than the power of a gun and a commanding position. He told them to shut up for their own good, and they obeyed him. After having seen what they had seen, who wouldn't have been ready to believe anything?

In George Washington's cell, Craig also put two of the stripped and humiliated keepers, being careful to assure them, most politely, that, in a short time,

he would see that every one got more comfortable quarters. But as to what all this was about, not a word, except such words as he had already spoken to Eddie, and Eddie to him.

Then the remaining keeper he had brought down from upstairs, always excepting Copton, he placed in the cell with the first night guard taken. Thus, while the night was still young, were six guards disarmed, disuniformed, locked up in cells where no amount of shouting would do them any good, and yet one other guard cowed, till no more dangerous than a rabbit in the presence of a rattlesnake.

"What are you going to do with him now?" asked Eddie, with his weak and tragic face reflecting a species of horror as he looked at the stricken Copton.

"I am going to ask him," said Craig, "to go fetch us the P. K.!"

"Oh, Tommy!"

"Oh, for God's sake, think a moment, Mr. Masters!"

This from the cells where the remaining prisoners still were. And why not? They had reason to dread Mr. Stievers, the principal keeper. Almost every prisoner who had ever gone through San Pedro did.

"It's merely to put him into safe-keeping, too," Craig announced. "Cheer up," he added. "It's to be a square deal for everybody—you keepers, included."

There was a groan and a curse, and a general muttering from the cells. But old Eddie, the Yegg, had his say. Said he:

" 'Tis a thought that'll bring you luck."

And these words sounded sweet in the echo of Craig's brain as he once more made his way up the stone steps and, this time, on through the guardhouse and out into the sparkling pure night of the San Pedro Prison yard. So long it had been since he had seen the open night—smelled it and tasted it, as

he was doing now—that he could have fallen over backward for sheer agony of joy.

This he had had taken away from him! The sky was clear. The stars were out. Well down in the southwest rode the crescent of a brand-new moon. And the air was of that crystalline blue purity of wild places far from cities.

It was in the midst of an unpeopled region that San Pedro stood. It wasn't much of a prison, as modern penal institutions go. It had been under a curse from the first, so one would have said who knew its history.

First of all, there was its location—as unlovely a place as ever was, except on a night like this, such as would have glorified any place. But ordinarily a region that was sterile, as bleak as Baffin Land in winter, as dusty hot as Death Valley in summer—a freak of nature—the bed of some long dead and dried-up sea, so the professors said. And it pushed up in the midst of other hills, north, south, east, and west, which were verdant, heavily timbered.

It was the worthlessness of this dead region that had made it the chosen site of San Pedro away back in the early history of the State. For the politicians had bought it in for a song, and then resold it to the State, in the good, old-fashioned way.

Not even the railroad had been built past San Pedro at that time. The railroad came only when the State began to grow and prosper so fast that a newer and greater prison was built elsewhere, and the railroad's advent was all that kept San Pedro in existence at all. For, even then, San Pedro was a place of evil repute. The initial scandal of how and where and by whom it had been built—this had been like a mother hen for the breeding of other scandals—generations of them.

But, finally, the old prison had seemed to settle down. It became a secondary prison—a sort of

disciplinary prison to which the scum of the other jails and penitentiaries were sent, or those prisoners who had shown themselves contumacious in court—as had one, Thomas Masters, who had refused any facts about himself even to the lawyer appointed to his defense, when said Masters was tried for shooting a man, with intent to kill, and so forth, in a labor camp.

So San Pedro each year had sunk a little lower in public esteem, become a little more a place for honest citizens, as well as lawbreakers to shudder at whenever its name was mentioned.

But San Pedro—a mere parallelogram of shimmering brick on a milky plain—was a thing of beauty on a night like this. It was, even, to others than to Craig—he who had looked at it a while back with the fervent eyes of the liberated, whose eyes would have seen beauty in a construction camp. For, so others had looked at it, too.

Ordinarily, train No. 93 didn't stop at San Pedro at all. It was a fast express, westbound, composed mostly of sleepers, and scheduled to pass the prison at thirteen minutes past midnight. But, this night, No. 93 stopped, as it was bound to do on signal. San Pedro was an institution of the State, and for the time being, at least, the State, not the railroad, was supreme.

The engineer looked down with surprise from the lofty cab as his great Mogul rode by. He wasn't used to seeing a crowd like that at San Pedro, not at this time of night. Generally, when he made this run, San Pedro lay as still and as dark and as apparently deserted as the desert around it.

The Mogul panted to a stop; and, looking back, the engineer made out that most of this crowd had been passengers. He caught a word here or there:

"Governor's orders—— Home for the holiday—— Good behavior—— Good-by—— Good-by——"

"Poor devils," said the engineer, without anger.

And he began a mental calculation where best he could pick up the time he had lost. It was a problem; but, at that, he felt better all along the run, at the idea of snaking them away—farther—farther yet!—those poor devils from the hell they had this night put behind them.

It was the conductor of No. 93, though, who had had the real surprise. What did the warden of San Pedro mean by dumping a load of ex-cons like this on a first-class train at midnight? Twenty-four of them—all in their new prison clothes—most of them smoking "State," as the tobacco of the prisons and poorhouses was called, and smoking this in raw, new pipes!

"Quick, men! Into the smoker!"

But their passes were in perfect order—passes that would later be turned in as vouchers to the State for payment—each pass duly stamped and signed by *"Copton, acting."*

"Isn't Copton that pie-faced little guard that used to deadhead out with us and get us to slow down so's he could jump off?"

The conductor looked at his brakeman and the brakeman looked at the conductor.

"Sure," said the brakeman, who was slow of speech. "That's him."

"Well, how in the devil," pursued the conductor, "did they ever come to make a hit like that——"

The conductor paused again, as if he might have had some ill-defined doubt or other in the back of his brain.

"He's merely acting," said the brakeman. The brakeman also took time for thought. "I remember now," he continued slowly. "I understand that there's

some sort of a shake-up coming off in San Pedro—that the governor's going to appoint one of these swell reform guys, or something."

"We should worry," droned the conductor, "even if they are going to the end of the division. Only—better make out a report—to get that car another sort of fumigation at the end of the run. Did you notice? Looked like the majority of those fellows had been sick."

The thought of all these convicts going free was in the brakeman's mind as he finally made his way to the rear platform of No. 93. He wasn't much of a poet, but—going home to celebrate the day of the Great Liberator! And the thought, with something of its poetic significance, lingered as he looked out through the starlight at the receding prison in the distance.

Then the brakeman strained his eyes, while another sort of thought took vague form in his mind. Just now it seemed to him that he had seen something else putting the prison behind it. He wasn't sure. The starlight was dim. But it appeared to be one of the San Pedro auto trucks ghosting off to the south. No, it couldn't be. What would a prison auto truck be doing out at this time of the night?

The starlight swallowed up the thing he had seen—or thought that he had seen. And presently the starlight swallowed up dim San Pedro itself. But all the time the brakeman was there by himself on the rear platform of No. 93—trimming his lights, recoiling the end of his bell rope—he was run through by a vague uneasiness, a hint of something impending. Or, was all this but an afterthought?

He turned.

A man was crouching there in the doorway of the car. Over the lower part of the man's face a bandanna handkerchief had been tied. He held an auto-

matic pistol, as if he loved it, close to his breast, but pointed at the brakeman. All this the brakeman noticed in the first dazed sweep of his eyes; then something else. The stranger was dressed in a stiff new suit of clothes, such as San Pedro furnished to those it set free.

CHAPTER IV

BY PROCESS OF LAW

TWENTY-FOUR away on the westbound express," said Craig, "and thirty-two thus far gone by truck, and that makes——"

"Fifty-six," said Warden Green.

The warden was a large man with a beard, and the warden had a great reputation as a laugher. Like many large men with a good digestion, the warden laughed easily when prisoners complained of mistreatment, laughed when they howled and cursed under punishment, laughed as he censored their letters to the outside world. But he wasn't laughing now.

He sat there in the corner of his office, unarmed, with shackles on his hands and feet, and a heavy desk shoved up close in front of him further to hinder his movements in case he should care to make any.

"By truck and train," Craig figured, "we ought to get at least a hundred more away by sunup—fifty in that box car to be picked up by the accommodation freight—and they can drop off here and there, wherever they please—fifty more on the next run of the truck back into the mountains——"

The warden blurted out something that was in his heart.

"Why don't you turn 'em all loose right off and be done with it?" he demanded. "What are you stallin' for? You got all the keepers under lock and key. You got me. I've opened the safe for you, haven't I? And I've give you my promise, haven't I?—fair and square, not to tip off the rest of the State until you've

all had your twenty-four-hour start—longer, if you say so."

"You still don't understand," said Craig. "But me—as I told the boys down there in the punishment block when this thing began—I believe in prisons. I believe in law and I believe in punishment. I was brought up that way. But also, I believe in justice!" The warden laughed in his beard.

"I do," said Craig, with a touch of controlled heat. "I believe in justice."

"You don't seem to."

"Those we've sent away already—those we're going to send away still, as soon as we can, without a hearing or, at least, without a trial, have been punished enough, or more than enough, or are innocent."

This time, the warden did laugh—mirthlessly, though.

"Innocent, like you are!"

"Green, if you knew all the facts, you'd change your tune."

"You shot a feller, didn't you?"

"That's not what I mean."

"Shot him in the back—Beekman——"

"If you knew all the facts——"

"I knew Beekman, and you shot him in the back."

"If I told you——"

"What? You had a fair trial. The court found you guilty."

Again the warden laughed, not because there was anything humorous in the situation; although there may have been, at that, according to his way of looking at it. The warden himself had received a quiet tip to the effect that his days at San Pedro had been numbered, anyway. The tip said that there was going to be a new warden. The new warden was going to have enough to worry about.

Said Craig: "Green, if you knew all the facts you'd never laugh again."

"Maybe I know more than you think I do."

"Let it go at that."

"But you oughtn't to blame me if my keepers laid on the rubber hose a little heavy now and then. I couldn't keep my eye everywhere. San Pedro ain't a Sunday school. I'll tell you what. You pick out those keepers that was rough and give 'em a taste of their own medicine. That'll square accounts."

Craig felt his mental feet slipping from the eminence to which he had climbed during those days and nights of toil and prayer. He hadn't intended to speak to Green more than was necessary. He needed all the strength that remained to him. Green, and the thoughts Green stirred, were a source of weakness.

"I am innocent!" hissed Craig, with a flash of color. "I'm innocent myself and you—you——"

The warden did change his tune this time.

"What was that," he demanded soothingly, "you said about trials, and so forth? Are you really aiming to——"

"Hold court? Yes."

"Where?"

"Here in the prison."

"With you as judge! Look here, Mr.—Masters——"

"Stop," Craig ordered softly. "There'll be a jury. Say what you have to say to them."

That perfect night of great events in the isolated little world of San Pedro Prison had dissolved magically, into a perfect dawn—a rift of pink clouds high up in the sky where the stars still lingered, and then a shifting of purple light to blue, and, after that, a gradual transfusion through this blue light of a billion motes of gold, of crimson; and then, there

was the first slant of the sun itself. It was as if all that had happened was the first act of a play, staged by a master stage director; or, better yet, it was as if this dawn had been designed especially for the isolated little prison—not only a Sunday dawn, but a Dawn of Glory.

So it must have seemed to many in San Pedro this day. For the rumor and quiver of great things had been running through the prison all the night, and the expectation of still greater things impending. It was curious—the silence! Silence, despite the fact that the night itself had brought permission for the prisoners to talk all they wanted, to sing—play such musical instruments as they might possess.

But the silence was such that almost the only thing heard at all as the sun came up was the clang of the chapel bell like a call to church; and afterward, the moan and chant of the chapel pipe organ, where Zabrewski, a musical genius gone wrong, improvised, and tried to express, and did express, the resurrection of his soul.

Only a few of the former keepers were on duty. The places of most of the others had been taken by men selected from among the prisoners themselves —old men mostly, and yet with something unfamiliar about them. And armed—all of them armed. There wasn't going to be any prison riot to spoil everything—not at this stage of the game.

This new force of guards went about the usual work in much the usual way. They announced that there was to be a new deal, that each man in the prison would get a new hearing. Also they announced, in divers speech, but all of it clear, that the inmate who tried to start anything on his own account was apt to be buried at the starting place.

Gradually, however, the situation revealed itself. Inmate No. 3777, "Three Sevens" they called him for

short, had made a successful break. But, instead of turning this to his own account, he had decided to let them all in on his good thing. There were forty-eight hours in which to carry the plan through—what was left of it, that is, for much had been accomplished already—committees appointed and sworn in, the first big detachments of parole men sent away. "Parole men" because they had given their word to do nothing to arouse suspicion, were under parole to break no law, to do their best to become regular citizens again—in short, not to abuse the liberty given them.

"Favoritism!"

There were already some whispers of favoritism. Not many, though. And they grew less as the day advanced. There was something too impressive, too suggestive about all this of the final Judgment Day.

> And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

That was the spirit. And Zabrewski, the musical genius, was expressing this on the pipe organ, too, whenever there was a lull—whenever the jury was debating whether it ought to send a man back to his cell again or turn him loose. All these sinners assembled there and trying to do justice in the sight of the Lord on this Sunday morning—it would have been enough to make an angel weep. And then, right in the midst of it all, it was as if an angel was there.

The chapel was filled with convicts at the time. The guards were around. On the platforms sat Three Sevens, otherwise and just for himself alone, Daniel Craig. To one side of Craig, the jury—furtive,

wise, and wonderstruck. To the other side, the prison clerk with the prison books and records, showing who was who, and the crimes each man was charged with at the time of his sentence.

There was dim light in the chapel, although the windows had been opened for the first time in twenty years and the sunlight was pouring in. And there, quite suddenly, right in the full drench of one of these slanting bars of gold light, the angel. No! Not a regular angel, but a girl who looked like one—bashful, baffled, yet fearless.

Perhaps she may have shed a tear or two, at that. She was very human—very feminine, too, although dressed in riding clothes—short skirt, spurred boots. But her hair was down her back, in a single, heavy schoolgirl tress. She had been wearing a flat-brimmed Stetson, but she had taken this off as if in deference to her surroundings, and her hair was yellow and it shimmered in the sun. A wonderful picture she made standing there, with her profile tilted up—blue eyes, pink lips slightly parted.

So intense had been the interest in that greater picture of what was unrolling in the chapel that for what seemed a long time she had remained all but unseen. For there was a prisoner at the bar.

It was an old man whom the other prisoners had nicknamed "Uncle Josh." So he looked, even with his hair and whiskers shorn, upward of sixty, sloping shoulders, a kindly but belligerent eye.

"Turn the old geezer loose."

This from juryman No. 6.

"He maimed a neighbor for killin' his hogs," whispered the clerk.

"He won't do it again."

"Neither will his neighbor."

The jury took a silent vote, signaled the vote to the judge.

"Free!" said the judge.

Uncle Josh reeled a little. His mouth snapped open, then shut, then open again, like a turtle taking the air, but not a word, not a murmur. He brought a gnarled knuckle to his eye. His head drooped. And, all this time, that genius Zabrewski wringing the heart out of the organ with *tremolo* and *vox humana.*

Then, just as a friend or two started to lead old Uncle Josh away, about every one saw her—the girl.

There was a gasp, like that of an air brake on a train; and it was as if a real air brake had been applied to the march of things. For there was a dead halt. Even Zabrewski saw her. His back was turned. But there was a little mirror hung up in front of him that gave him a slanting view of the hall.

It was Craig who spoke up. He was the man to do it. He felt as if the whole court—or congregation—centered its voice in his.

"Who—whom was it you wished to see?"

The words spoken at the great crises in the affairs of men are usually small and banal like that.

The girl's voice rang out sweet and clear, but with a slight huskiness of emotion in it.

"My father!"

There was a craning of necks. This was interesting. Who of the inmates of San Pedro, pray, could have a daughter like this? It was a question even more interesting than those of how the girl had come to be here, where she came from.

Eddie, the Yegg, wearing a uniform several sizes too big for him, here shuffled forward, dragging one foot slightly, as is the way of one who at some time or other has worn a cavalry saber or a ball and chain. But Eddie knew the way of courts. He tried to speak as a regular court attendant should.

"If it please your honor——"

It was terrible to hear Eddie speak aloud. He had conversed so long in whispers, inside of prison and out, that his voice sounded fragile and shaky, like big, mere balloons of speech, blown up by the breath of the man.

"What is it?" Craig asked.

"I was watchin' the gate," labored Eddie. "She come—asks fer her dad——"

Eddie stopped. He had done his part—all he could, at least. Craig had turned to the girl. There was a whisper among the jury.

"We turn her old man loose, whatever he done."

And Craig felt easier for having heard this.

"What is your father's name?" he asked.

For the first time the girl showed a hint of alarm, of fright. She threw a quick glance about her, brought her eyes back to the man on the platform as to the one thing, the one person, to which she could cling.

"Gracie," she said. "I am Miss Gracie." And, without further ado, there was the prison clerk looking through the books for the name of Gracie, but quite sure that there was no such name there—unless it was the name of a dead man, or some one who had been transferred elsewhere more than a year before. An awkward situation.

"He was to have got here this morning," said the girl.

"Oh!"

But Craig was forcing his mind to stick to the facts.

"This is Sunday," he said.

"I know."

"And they were bringing him here, to-day?"

Did the girl understand? There was something she didn't understand. She gasped the one word:

"Yes!"

"But they don't receive inmates——"

Craig was going to say that they didn't receive inmates on Sunday, or visitors either, but the girl cut in on him:

"Inmates!"

"Yes, but——"

"My father's the warden," she said.

"Warden Green?"

"Warden Gracie! The newly appointed warden. The governor—isn't this San Pedro? What has happened? *Where's my father?*"

Her voice was lifted on what, for want of a better word, may be called a turbulence. Not much of a turbulence, at the start, but a swirling riot of sounds subdued—a flow of speech, a resumption of breathing, the sounds of movement. On this, for a moment or so, her voice had as it were floated like something bright on the rising water of a muddy overflow, then sank in it.

"Gracie, the reformer!"

"He's on the way wit' a bunch of fresh bulls!"

"Good night!"

And other expressions that were incoherent. Not violent as yet, but hinting of danger as if the muddy overflow might rise, take on strength of a current, and become a flood.

Craig caught this feeling. So, most likely, did the girl. She turned, somewhat as if she would have left the place. But others may have caught the feeling, too—that feeling that was neither enmity, precisely, nor yet desire for evil. A subtle feeling that a change was coming over the face of things—a change for the worse. A crack in the iron chain of discipline. Caged jungle beasts that have got a whiff of blood.

The girl shrank back. The turbulence assumed something of the nature of a growl.

"Fellers," a shrill voice intoned, "we're in danger here."

"Order!" shouted Craig.

But he was too late.

"And I moves," shrilled the voice, "we take this gal as a hostage!"

CHAPTER V

"YOUR WORK!"

IT was right then that Eddie had his moment of greatness. It comes to every man once in his lifetime, and blessed is he who is ready for it when it does come. Eddie was ready. Eddie may have wondered what his own particular schooling was for those nights when he had stood with revolver ready, watching, waiting, every nerve trained for quick violence. This was it.

"Bang!"

A flash, a report, a strand of smoke; and there was the owner of the shrill voice lunging up like a man who reaches for a butterfly.

There was the picture of Eddie himself—*Rip Van Winkle* awaking from his sleep, but shorn of hair and beard; *Rip* as Joe Jefferson presented him, mostly eyes, tragic, but stirred and amused.

"The court," said Craig, "is adjourned. The guards will maintain order."

All this as if it hadn't been swift, as if it had been arranged, a little stiff and formal, yet dignified, and called for by the circumstances. The butterfly chaser now collapsing, supported by his brethren. Eddie still revolving the dark searchlight of his eyes. Other guards flexing their arms to bring their weapons into play.

And Craig, taking his time about it, just as a regular judge would have done, stepped down from the platform, turned to the left, gained that side aisle at

the other end of which the girl stood. He came up to her.

So much while the heavy blow of Eddie's shot was still reverberating in the air, or, at least, in the minds of the convicts good and bad, who happened to be present.

"I think you'd better get out of here," said Craig softly to the girl, as he came close to where she stood.

She shrank from him slightly, with horror in her eyes. He smiled at her soberly. He could feel that his own face was bloodless. Curiously, some voice in his brain was telling him that this was on her account, not his own. Otherwise, he was as cold and steady as he had been those ten or eight hours ago —or ten or eight years, so it seemed—that he had come creeping up to the guardroom from the punishment block.

This coldness he threw about him as they say an iceberg chills the air at sea, when he turned and looked at his fellows. But the coldness was of the nerves, not of the heart. He saw what was needed. These men were like children, with brains that were stunted, or crooked, or dulled. This was a new game. They didn't understand it very well. And yet the playing of it, like some new exercise, or like some new system of education, might mean the salvation of a number of them, at least.

"The jury," Craig announced, "will select another judge, so that there will be no loss of time. Are you with me for maintaining order?"

There was a shout, mostly of approval. But this first shout was followed by another shout, a scream:

"Shot me!"

It was the voice of the butterfly chaser. And there he was, the man that Eddie had wounded, threshing about and spitting blood. Those who had been hold-

ing him up were beginning to look vengeance, while Eddie backed away, ready to fire again, and fresh shouts and screams went up.

There was another shot, and this spawned howls with the awful fecundity of most elemental things. Some one howled into the face of the girl, and Craig bashed straight into the open mouth with his fist, although he was armed; and then he was striking this way and that, with elbows and fists, the center of a sudden mob, only one thought in his head at all, and that to protect the girl.

He did protect her, but himself he couldn't have told how—not in detail; mostly by the smashing of heads, a roughing of it with shoulders and knees, in the midst of jaggedness—call it that—as applied to speech and action. Then, he and the girl were outside the chapel.

"This way!"

Even now, there seemed to be no great speed in what was taking place. Every one was groping, as through a thick darkness—as, indeed, they were. But Craig and the girl were up a flight of stairs, bringing a nightmare vision with them of men who ran toward the chapel—men armed with shotguns—so armed by Craig himself, who had put them under oath.

Craig paused to swing a grilled gate shut back of them, and to make sure that the lock had caught. Up the stairs were the principal offices of San Pedro—the telegraph and the telephone; the records, personal and otherwise, which were still there other than such books as had been taken to the chapel. But at the door of the offices they paused—Craig and the girl. They looked into each other's eyes, as people sometimes will when they both listen for the same thing. That was what they were doing—listening—waiting—remembering the guards they had left below

and those other guards who had been seen coming on the run.

Shots! Almost a volley! Then silence.

At that, the girl began to sob—silently, spasmodically—while the tears came into her eyes. But she was still looking at Craig.

"Go in there and wait," said Craig. "You'll be safe here."

"And you?"

He pointed below.

"No!"

He put out a hand to support himself against the side of the door. He saw that his hand was covered with blood. He didn't want the girl to see, so he lowered his hand. So doing, he almost lost his balance and lurched against the jamb like a drunken man, hung there with his shoulder. A slight haze swept across his eyes. Nothing much. He sought to explain:

"I'm—out of—training."

Also it was meant for an apology. He hated weakness. He didn't want to appear weak. But, after all, it had been bad for him—that beating he had received from Copton, his stay in the hospital, his removal to the dark cell while he was still more or less mauled up. And since then! How many days and nights had there been without sleep—or almost without—while he was sawing, half-dozing, half-awake? He didn't know. He didn't care. But he didn't want to appear weak—not in the presence of this girl.

He let her lead him, none the less, to an office chair, and there he slumped—making efforts all the time to summon his strength. He was needed back in the chapel. There he would have to go.

"Take off your coat," she said.

"No!"

"Take off your coat!"

She was removing it for him, quick and deft.

He had objected merely because this would have been another evidence of weakness, also more delay. Had the girl already suspected? Not only suspected, but known—his shorn, but unkempt head, the prison pallor of his skin. Still, she may not have noticed these things when there was so much that had clamored for her attention. But she knew for a certainty, when his coat slipped off, when she saw his canvas shirt. There was a spreading blood stain on his shirt. The blood was spreading over the grossly stenciled letters: "S. P. P."

The initials of San Pedro Prison—the brand of bondage as much as stripes would have been. She comprehended. She comprehended everything—everything, that is, that she had seen and experienced since her arrival here this otherwise bright and lovely Sabbath morning. And no one could have told from her voice—not even herself perhaps—what her feelings were as she murmured:

"Your work?"

"My work," he answered. His voice rose. He was struggling to his feet. *"My work!"*

That was his last flare of strength. It was, for some time. He collapsed. It was the loss of blood that was doing for him—a knife wound on his breast, another on his shoulder. He didn't lose consciousness, although he sat there with his head lolling about, like a man who is asleep or a man who is drunk. So far as mental symptoms went, he was a little of both, slightly delirious.

He wasn't trying to go to the chapel any more because, as a matter of fact, he thought he was there.

"You're free—free!"

This was when he thought he was still the judge.

"Order! Order!"

He yelled it so loud that the cry brought him a

fresh spasm of pain, so acute that he was wide awake again, and there was the girl back at his side with gauze and medicaments. The hospital was just back of the offices, on the same floor. It proclaimed its presence with a smell of creosote, a smell of ether and iodoform. It had needed no sleuth to find it.

"Who are you?" he asked.

She humored him, repeated the information that she had given in the chapel, with additions. The governor, informed of some of the things that transpired in San Pedro, had induced his friend, Major Jerome Gracie, to become head of the institution, there to put into effect cherished theories of his as to what a prison should be—discipline, fair treatment, self-government, education.

"But where is he? Where is he?" the girl broke in. "He was to have been here with his commission, at dawn. I was coming up from Fairhaven to join him here. The car broke down. A farmer offered me a horse—twenty miles——"

It was a broken narrative. She was skilled in first aid. She was treating his wounds with rough but efficient knowledge, unsparing of the iodine. Her talk was lulling. It killed the pain. Perhaps she knew this. She couldn't have been telling him all this merely for his information. To Craig, that golden head of hers, so near his eyes, was another sort of dawn. The pain he felt was not the scalding iodine, but a regret, a stabbing yet curative hope.

"He never broke an engagement in his life—taught me that——" the girl continued, as her clean, strong hands manipulated the tape. And all the time she was doing this, intent at once on this convict patient of hers and on the subject of her father, she kept casting glances—almost of appeal, one would have said—at the telephone on the desk at one side of the room.

Then the telephone bell began to ring sharply, as if to proclaim that the message was important.

"I'll go," said Craig.

"Stay where you are," the girl said.

"Stand back," said Craig.

"It's my father," she completed desperately.

She tried to leap to the telephone ahead of him. But, wounded and only half-bandaged as he was, he flung himself ahead of her. He picked up the instrument, faced her.

"I'm warden here as yet," he flung at her over the whirring of the bell.

"Let me speak to him, you—you——"

"I'm responsible," he said more gently.

"Responsible for the riot and the killing!"

"For everything," he said, with unconscious dignity. He lifted the receiver. "Hello! Hello!"

There was a pause, while the girl stared at him—her slender frame tense, her fingers working.

"Yes, this is San Pedro Prison. No matter who this is. State your message. Ben Jarvis escaped? Committed an assault?"

"Ben Jarvis!" whispered the girl, with a movement of recoil, as Craig hung up the receiver, put the instrument down. "Ben Jarvis, the outlaw?"

Craig nodded.

"And you set him free?"

"Not that I know of."

"But he was here. I know. I've helped my father go over the records."

Again Craig nodded. There had been a cessation of noise from the chapel, but the noise had broken out in another part of the prison. The prison bell clanged a few times, as if in response to an inexperienced hand.

Craig stumbled to a window. The sun was shining. The sky was cloudless. In some respects it was

the picture of a world that he remembered—as an adept may remember a day or an epoch from an earlier avatar.

But he saw that the auto truck had returned from another trip, that it was being loaded by all the men who could gain a handhold or a foothold on it. The stronger were compelling the weak to remain behind. The voices of the mob came up to him. Vaguely, like hasty shadow sketches, he saw figures and faces which he recognized as those of men who should never have escaped.

He heard a gasp from the girl. He turned. She was facing another convict—a man who was lithe and graceful, who might have been handsome, in a darksome way, if it hadn't been for the snarl on his face, a snarl compounded of greed and all other evil. Craig recognized the man, San Pedro's only member of the nobility. He was an international thief and trickster of great reputation, known as "Count Wolf."

Wolf saw Craig and decided to go elsewhere.

There was all the reason in the world why Craig should regain control of the prison. But the sleepiness and the loss of blood were combining against him in a fresh attack. It was all that he could do to keep back a whimper.

The girl surveyed him. He was young. His face was almost boyish. It might have been the face of a student. There were ambition and purpose in the broad, high forehead, in his gray eyes.

There was an accusation in her own eyes. It seemed to be trembling on her lips. But all she said, just then, was:

"You're bleeding again. Quick! Let me finish that bandage."

Again Craig was fighting off a desire to sleep, an intrusion of dreams. This intrusion of dreams was

curious in that his whole life in prison was like a dream. He had never been arrested, never been tried, never been handcuffed. So it seemed it had all been a nightmare. Now he was waking from it. He had been sick. Who was this girl? He must have muttered something of this.

"Who are you?" she asked in turn.

"Daniel Craig."

"Craig? Craig? I remember no such name in the San Pedro list."

"No one knew," he announced with a glimmer of triumph. "Here, I was Thomas Masters—Three Sevens!"

"Why did you kill that man?" She had suddenly remembered.

"I didn't." He laughed. "The kid shot him on his sister's account. Poor little——"

Craig jerked back his head, awake again.

"Tell me," said the girl.

"What?"

"You didn't kill him, but——"

A one-armed convict with a face like a weasel, or like an ermine, rather, his face was so white, came limping into the room with a grin. He was small and wizened. He carried a sheet of flimsy yellow paper in his hand, and this stirred Craig to the knowledge that here was the prison telegrapher.

"Been lookin' for you, boss," he said in a high, nasal voice. "Looks like some of the boys——"

He stopped and stared at the girl with a malicious grin.

"Give me the message and go back to the key," said Craig, as he put out an unsteady hand.

But when the telegrapher was gone, Craig looked at the yellow tissue paper the telegrapher had handed him; he was unable to read what was written thereon.

"Something the—matter—with my eyes," said Craig.

The girl took the message, read:

"BANNER JUNCTION.

"Train No. 93 robbed ten miles east here by masked men, supposed escaped convicts, San Pedro. Party boarded train on signal at your station last night——"

"Shall I go on?" the girl faltered.

"My work!" breathed Craig ghastly. "Go on! Go on!"

She read:

"Conductor, brakeman shot, and three passengers also wounded. Leader of band partly identified Bud Gaspell supposed to have been in San Pedro serving life imprisonment. Wire details."

There followed the name of a famous sheriff.

"My work! My work!" breathed Craig.

CHAPTER VI

JUST AND UNJUST

THERE was a sound of cheering from the prison yard, and this brought the two of them again to their feet. Craig was stricken. In his own mind he was like a crazy man. He was a man who had committed a stupendous crime. There was no righting of it. Glimpsingly, he looked back on himself as he had been in the cell, and found that it was then he had been blessed without knowing it—serving a term on behalf of another, on behalf of a lad he had scarcely known, but whom he had pitied. Then, his conscience had been clear. Now, he was already seared with the fire eternal. And this, or most of it, must have been in his eyes as they met hers.

Craig picked up the revolver he had discarded when she had begun to bandage him. He handed this to her.

"Take this," he said. "As soon as I'm through that door, lock it. There's the telephone. Use it as you will. You can. The exchange in Pine City will help you."

She took the revolver. She understood the possible necessity of it. She shuddered.

"Where are you going?"

"Out there."

"You may be killed. They're out of hand."

"They're out of hand," he said. "That's why I go. There'll be wholesale murder next. The old warden —the guards! Locked up! Men who have sworn to kill——"

There was another outburst of cheering. No, cheering is not the word. It was the howl of a mob.

"Fire!" the girl gasped.

Through the window that overlooked the yard there had come a curl of smoke. There slanted across the yard a shadow as from a cloud, and she knew that the sky was cloudless. She hurried across the room to look out. She turned. Craig was gone.

How strangely she had remembered the facts of his case as soon as he had mentioned the name of Thomas Masters. She and her father had looked up this case particularly when the major was still making up his mind whether or not he should accept the almost martyrdom of an appointment to San Pedro—exchange his residence, well equipped, luxurious, even, for the squalid quarters which were all that San Pedro would have to offer; exchange the society of his friends for the society of Nature's misfits and throwbacks, her human failures and freaks. But San Pedro had offered an appeal all its own—that ancient riddle of Evil, and of Good.

"No man is consistently evil; no man is consistently good," Jerome Gracie had said. "Now, here is the case of this Thomas Masters. See! They have him at San Pedro—twenty years—for murder. Now, I happened to be present at his trial. He might have saved himself had he spoken. He didn't kill that man, Beekman, for robbery, nor, apparently, for revenge, nor yet, certainly, for sheer wantonness. What was the motive?"

What was Joan Gracie's motive now when, instead of locking herself in this room where she would be safe, she ran out to follow Craig? Him, the all-but-nameless convict? Him, whose work this was?

No answer, except, perhaps, that she was her father's daughter. So Jerome Gracie himself would have done. Or, that simpler answer yet; that she was

feminine—that this convict had fought in her defense and that she had nursed his wounds, and that, therefore, by the oldest law of the world—but one which she would have instantly denied—this man to some extent was hers and she was his.

She sped down the stairs. The iron gate that guarded the bottom of them was still closed and locked. She went back through a corridor. Here was an open door. This way he had passed. She found another door and stumbled through it into the brightness of the yard.

How fast he had gone! She saw him crossing the yard—a gaunt and shaky figure in bandages. He was making toward a band of men who turned to greet him. And once more, unaccountably, the girl felt for him a spasm of pity; of more than pity—of sympathy, of anguish and admiration.

But Craig himself had moved with a strength that was not his own. So he himself would have testified. So far as he was concerned, his prayers had been answered, and he had died, and this thing that he called himself was the mere ghost of the Daniel Craig who had once lived, and moved, and had his being in the vast freedom of the world.

Like that he moved upon the merrymakers who had started the fire. It wasn't much of a fire as yet, but smoky—the paint house, happily detached. Had Craig been a ghost in all reality not otherwise would the cheerful bandits have looked at him. For Craig had that supernatural look about him that most men have when they have passed above natural fear.

"Choke off that fire, you fools!"

Not loud. He didn't have to raise his voice.

"Shut the door," some one cried softly.

The door of the paint house was shut, and they that had set the fire now ran this way and that like rats out of a demolished barn.

In this the groping convicts had been able to act swiftly, at last. There were a few who had lingered, after the scene in the chapel—lingered with some idea of loot, some hankering for revenge, but it was Freedom that was calling to them the loudest. They had begun to scatter. The scatter had become a rush. No longer than it had taken Craig to get the girl to the office, and the girl there to bandage his wounds, and the brief time required for such other things as had there transpired, than the prison had begun to be abandoned.

Only the former officers remained, locked up; and only a few wretches who had been hurt in the rioting.

Craig and the girl went here and there about the prison.

They found Eddie, the Yegg, of the tragic eyes, unhurt. He whispered that he had sequestered the horse on which the girl had come riding to the prison.

"You could have taken it and ridden away," said Miss Gracie.

Eddie had no word for that. He wasn't used to speaking to women. He merely looked at Craig with a haunted smile.

"He knew that he wouldn't get far," said Craig.

Eddie nodded.

"Few of them will," said the girl. "It's always that way. They'll be rounded up—almost all of them——"

She broke off and communed with herself, as one will who has got hold of a thought that leads off into channels not yet clearly seen.

"I did this," said Craig, "as an act of justice—justice! In the world I was living in there was no justice! The innocent suffered with the wicked! I knew that it shouldn't be! I wanted to set things right!"

He was half out of his head.

Perhaps they all were out of their heads a little bit. There was a grotesquerie in the world itself that wasn't rational at all. This was a beautiful Sunday, now warming to late afternoon, yet it was shot full of nightmare. This was a prison. In it the only prisoners were those who should have been the masters.

The three of them—Eddie, Craig, and the girl—succored the wounded. They gave water to the men whom Craig himself had caged. Craig would have let them out, but the girl prevented him, Eddie abetting. There were those among the guards who would have killed Craig and Eddie, too, as their first act on getting out.

CHAPTER VII

THE PROMISE

THE girl said a number of things in the course of this day that were to remain with Craig always, just as would the presence of her as she said them—soft-voiced, clear-eyed, brave. She was only eighteen or so, but she had talked so much with her father that she talked like a man plus a woman's instinct to soothe and heal:

"You've had a dream that turned out bad—but that is no reason why you shouldn't dream again. Half the tragedies of this world were caused by dreamers, but so also all of the world's progress. My father'll set things right here in San Pedro. The courts'll put you in a cell for life if you stay here. You can be of more use outside. Outside you can offset the evil you've let loose."

She was urging him to flee.

"If I should bring them back?" said Craig.

"Bring them back?"

"Ben Jarvis, Bud Gaspell——"

Among the papers that had been left on the chapel table by the convict who had acted as clerk of that curious, improvised court of the morning, was a little red memorandum book. The girl seized this. She meditated. She looked at Craig.

"Yes, yes," she said. "The small and the weak—they don't matter. They'll be herded back here like sheep, when the posses get a start. It's the men like Bud Gaspell, train robber and highwayman, and Ben Jarvis, who kills for pleasure, and 'Trick' O'Ray."

The two of them worked over the records like a pair of students in a library. They added name after name to the list in the little red book. There were those on the list whom Craig had never seen nor known. But the girl knew them, by reputation. She had been her father's secretary—and, for that matter, almost his sole companion, since her mother's death two years before.

Sinister, cruel, perverse; men who were as deadly as moccasin snakes, and as ruthless, as concentrated in the satisfaction of their own needs and appetites. Wild men, like "Sancho Red," "of the arid hills, who tortured as well as killed"—their names, and, when necessary, their descriptions, all went into the little red ledger, put there by this girl with blue eyes and the shimmering hair, written out in a schoolgirl hand.

There was no time to waste. Craig himself had now sent the news of what had happened in the prison by telephone and haltingly, by telegraph, to the outside world.

Craig had told the girl the purport of that first telephone message that had reached him after he and she had left the chapel when the riot began. Major Gracie himself had been wounded by Ben Jarvis. Nothing much. A mere scratch. Father and daughter had later talked together over the telephone. And now Major Gracie had resumed his interrupted run by special train and would be here in less than an hour.

Craig had told the girl about his past—all of it. There was no more formality between them than if the two of them were on a life raft on a stormy sea at night. But at that, she was taking much for granted. She trusted him. She understood what he meant when he said that he would bring back to prison the enemies of society he had unwittingly set free. It was she who referred to the little memo-

randum book as his ledger—the one in which they had written out his debt.

When he would have faltered on her account, it was she who bravely encouraged him.

"You started out to do a great thing, and an original thing. Do it yet. In the meantime I'll get my father and I'll do it myself. We'll prove your innocence, get you a pardon."

Night was closing down. Back of the prison, a quarter of a mile away, there was a dry gully with a few stunted willows in it. She had noticed this when she was riding to the prison. To this place she sent Eddie with the horse. Craig was to ride this horse. He was to leave it at a certain place where the farmer who owned it could get it later.

She thought of everything. She lived in Fairhaven. Four or five miles out of Fairhaven, she had an aunt—a Miss Katherine Middleton—eccentric, but with a heart of gold, who lived in a cottage near some big woods.

Her voice came fitfully, or so Craig, his head momentarily skipping and whirling, heard her. He broke in:

"You're getting yourself into trouble, helping a convict!"

"Don't say the word," she cried. "You're not a convict—not in your eyes, or mine. Don't you suppose I know what you tried to do? Hasn't my father been trying to do the same sort of thing all his life—only in a different way with different luck? You're a brute to make me talk this way—when I'm trying so hard to—see straight, do right——"

Craig was stricken with pity and awe. This girl had been acting like a soldier, like a man. For nothing at all she again had tears in her eyes, had a quivering lip.

"Forgive me," he said, without knowing what it was he had to be forgiven for.

The girl steadied herself, looked at the little red book. She had covered several pages of it with her writing.

"This is the list," she said.

He put out his hand.

"Wait," she said.

She wrote something else in it:

This book is given to Daniel Craig by Joan Gracie.

She looked at him with an expression that was not a smile exactly, although he always remembered it as a smile. In pain and danger, and in the blackest despair, he remembered this look she was giving him now as the most beautiful smile he had ever seen. It was a look of illumination, vision, faith.

"There," she said. "If they find it now, there will be no doubt as to where it came from."

And she quoted her father again—something to the effect that a lot of suffering in the world was due, also, to the fear so many people had of appearing to be foolish, of not seeming respectable.

"Joan," said Craig.

"Daniel," said she, and it was the first time that he had heard himself so addressed for more than two years; it stirred his heart within him.

"May God and His angels bless you," said Craig, his own eyes reaffirming the words.

"Just promise to do your best," said the girl. "You're going out to battle. You're going out to fight for your country. That's what my father says. Every criminal's a traitor. You've got a debt to pay. So has every one. Yours is written out in the little

red ledger. And when you've settled that, there'll be other debts."

"I'll pick out the worst man first, and turn him in——"

"No, not that," the girl interrupted him. "Take them as you find them. Oh, be careful!" Her thought crystallized. "All the time, you'll be between two fires. Don't you see—the law on one side, the outlaws on the other——"

"I've thought of that," said Craig.

"Listen," said the girl, now speaking more out of her heart than out of her brain. Her eyes wavered, came back to his. "You're on probation. You've got to report to me. I don't know how. But you've got to report."

"You'll hear from me—'Three Sevens,'" said Craig. "Until my debt is paid, I'll be Three Sevens."

Then, through the vast silence of the prison and the San Pedro country there sounded the hooting wait of a rushing train. The might and the majesty of retributive law!

To Daniel Craig, riding away from San Pedro on the horse that had been furnished him by Joan Gracie, along the road that she had indicated, there came a feeling at once so sad and so joyful that he could have cried aloud. No words could express the feeling. It was too overwhelming for words.

Ticketed and wrinkled, but clean enough, he had found the clothing that he had worn when the sheriff had brought him to San Pedro two years ago from the city where he had been tried and sentenced. But he was no longer the man—or the boy—who had worn that clothing then. As surely as it had happened to that certain man of Bethany, he also had died, been entombed, and now was alive again.

His wounds hurt him. The bandages might have been burial cloths. He had an agonizing sense—still

as Lazarus might have had—that this new lease of life was too good to be true, could not last.

He took off his familiar old felt hat. He raised his face to the night.

Thus his mind surveyed the past.

Mostly poor, introspective, oversensitive, often unhappy—that had been his lot up through boyhood, as he perceived it. Yet always some lurking faith was there in a happiness to come, a happiness to be fought for and won. Was this the beginning of the final campaign?

He had no family. Even the stern and pious old grandmother who had reared him was dead. He had started to work his way through the State University. He was going to be an engineer. No other calling seemed big enough. There were deserts to water, swamps to drain, chasms to bridge. Then came his expulsion—one of those tragedies of college life that seem too small to the outside world. It had all started as a joke on a certain crabbed old professor, a chance to steal his examination papers, and Craig accused of cheating.

There swept in upon him even now the old sense of having been disgraced for life, a whiff of that morbid sickness that had almost driven him to suicide.

It was with this mental sickness upon him, and a willingness to die, that he had tramped into a strange labor camp and there found that other boy whose tragedy surpassed his own—a sister crying her heart out back home, the boss of this camp "the guilty man," a boyish sense of honor calling for retribution. Then the shot in the dark, Craig's promise to say nothing, the flight of this other youth, Craig himself arrested for murder.

There was no wise old friend to tell him that he was a fool for feeling the way he did at what had happened in college, that the world forgets, that no

man is perfect, that every one goes wrong some time or other, and that now he was by way of committing suicide indeed. Anyway, he had thought that the real slayer would return; he had thought that he would be let off. He had believed that maybe this was an intended atonement for his "sin" in college. He had thought many things.

But now, Craig, with his hat in his hand, and his face still up, got a message out of the night that Joan Gracie understood his tale of folly and suffering.

How strange it had seemed to him before that he had been sent to San Pedro—San Pedro of all prisons! But now, hadn't a part of the plan—the Plan—been revealed to him since it was at San Pedro that he had met Joan Gracie? Wasn't there, after all, an immutable truth in what the great and gentle Emerson had written about compensation?

On a ridge, only a mile or so from San Pedro, he had paused to watch the arrival of the special train. It wasn't much of a train, merely a locomotive and a caboose—a few twinkling lights, and a flash of firelit steam. Faintly, through the puffing of the engine, Craig heard a sound of excited voices. There was going to be some quick action. He was sure of that. Still, his soul was tranquil. He felt no need of hurry. Whatever would happen was bound to happen, whatever should happen was bound to be good.

He recalled a dozen times in his life when black despair had clawed and gnawed at his heart like a bloody-fanged vampire.

No more. He had gone down into the gates of hell and had come out again. And, even in the gates of hell, there had still been hope, had he only known it. He knew it now. He would always know it—that men were fools to worry, to succumb to fright.

Suddenly, he heard a soft cry, saw a dim form surging up in front of him. Then, as Craig snatched at his revolver:

"Boss! Don't shoot!"

It was George Washington, late of the dark cells.

He was a big negro, counted bad, in more than one jail and labor camp. Even now, he was checking that first movement of recognition, drawing back for a possible attack. He was armed.

"Is it you?" he queried in his soft voice.

"Me—Three Sevens," Craig answered.

"Bless God!"

The negro came up to Craig's bridle. Craig told him something of what had passed. Washington had been one of the first to get away, but he had slept the day through on the warm earth.

Craig saw in the negro a possibly ally. He would need an ally for a while. George Washington was willing. He also needed an ally. Toward morning they tied the horse in the corner of a field, where the owner would find it. Then they came to a stream —Craig staggering—where they drank their fill. There were wild hills all about them. They picked their way up a rocky gulch where even a hound would have had a hard time to trail them. They came to a platform of rock, where they could command a view for miles back in the direction whence they had come.

Craig slept.

It was late afternoon when he awoke. And now he felt not so much like a man who had come back from death as one who was going to die. The negro was gone. But just when Craig was beginning to realize what it might mean to him to be all alone here in the hills now, tracked, weak, without food or the means of acquiring it, there was his black friend again. He had a hatful of eggs.

"Where'd you get them?" Craig asked.

The negro told him. Five or six miles from where they were there was a big stock farm. There, George had found a barrel with bran in it, and he was so hungry he was going to eat a mouthful of bran. But when he had shoved his hand into the bran, he found that the bran was full of eggs, put there by some thieving farmhand, no doubt, to keep them fresh until he should have enough of them to make it worth while to take a trip to market on his own account."

They ate the eggs, raw.

Night found them on their way again, out across the houseless, treeless prairie that appeared to be a deserted cattle range. The night like the one before, was radiant and clear, with a waxing moon.

They talked about religion. They talked about justice. Then Craig asked George if he didn't think that prisons were right, and George said that, yes, he did think that prisons were right if they were good prisons, and that was why he had sworn his oath, when Craig asked him to, not to abuse the liberty that he was going to receive.

"How much longer did you have to serve?" asked Craig.

"One more year."

"If you knew that, during this year, you'd get good treatment, good food, and time off for good conduct, would you go back?"

"White man, what you aimin' at?"

Craig told him. He showed George the red ledger.

"You got me frighten'," said George.

"You needn't be frightened," said Craig, "except of all the people you'll ever pass in the road, and each time that you lie down to sleep, and every time that you want a mouthful of food——"

"Man! Man!"

"I'm talking for your own good, George. I'm trying to help you because I'm going to need your help."

"What you want me to do?"

"I want you to swear another oath—here under the stars."

George swore. And Craig had not only an ally, but a deputy. There were a dozen names set down in the little red book that Joan Gracie had given him. Twelve names, each like a sum charged against him by society. He would have to pay off each sum by returning the escaped convict to prison. There could be no delay, for with every day of delay there would be an increment of interest.

These men that the daughter of the new warden of San Pedro had charged up against Craig in this little red ledger were not likely to remain idle, now that they were free. They would be hungry before long. They would begin their quest for prey, as two of them already had done.

"Man! Man!" said the negro, as Craig discussed his plans.

"I'm going to arrest them myself and bring them back or see that they are taken back," said Craig. "When I organized the revolution I meant that none of them should get away—none except those who, like you, had been punished enough and who would take the oath to do no wrong when the jury turned them loose."

"And when you done bring these men back?"

"I'll return to San Pedro myself," said Craig. "You can't fool with the law, George. The law is too big, too old."

"Ain't you breakin' the law now?" asked George, with native cunning.

"Not the higher law," said Craig. "I'm working for the law. I've made a mistake. I'm going to

try and right that mistake. I will right it—so help me God!"

But it was of Joan Gracie that he thought.

Softly, his black deputy repeated some of those names from the red ledger, fearsome names, repeated fearsomely in the black man's mellow voice:

"Bud Gaspell! Trick O'Ray! Sancho Red! Man! Man! They's bad. And Ben Jarvis! Count Wolf!"

"I'll get them," said Craig, with his thought on the girl.

CHAPTER VIII

IN SAN PEDRO

AS for Joan Gracie, there in San Pedro awaiting the arrival of the train that was to reëstablish her connection with the world as she had always known it before that surprising day, she also had felt as if she had been through a miracle—something painful, a miracle of new birth, enthralling, like a grip on new life.

"Why? Why?" there came a question in her heart. Why had she dressed this man's wounds and helped him to get away, when it would have been so simple to do what he himself had told her to do—lock herself in the prison office and await developments—telephone for help—anything other than what she had done?

True, in her mind's eye, she could see him again as she had first seen him, there in the chapel, a man with one of the most astounding dreams that had ever entered the brain of a man—so futile, and yet so beautiful—a mortal portrait set to organ music! And then when he was fighting for her and she had thrilled with a true perception of just how great her danger was!

He had fought like a hero—fought for her. What else could she have done than to care for his wounds? And, once she had heard his story and recognized it was true, for no man would have invented a story of such exalted folly, what could she do but guide him as a sister or a mother would have guided him?

Three short blasts from the rushing special. Her

father was coming on that train. What would he say?

Now the train was so close that she could hear the thunder of the wheels and the escaping steam. She left the man Eddie in charge of the hospital, where she had lingered to the last instant. She rushed away to meet her father at the prison gate.

It was true. His wound had been a mere scratch. Fifteen miles back Major Gracie's auto had been held up by three highwaymen—one of them recognized as Ben Jarvis. It was Jarvis who had fired in a free way he had, seeing how close he could come to his victims without killing them. The bandits had stolen the auto and fled.

There had followed for the major and the three men who accompanied him a tramp to the nearest railroad station, the call for the special train. Now, here he was, master of a prison that was all but emptied.

All this on a Sunday when the whole world had been as still as a mill pond, apparently. But out of space, like a meteorite out of the sky, something had fallen into the pond with a splash that was to echo far, send out its widening circles no one could tell how far.

The newspapers not only of this State, but of other States, were going to have a rare sensation on the following morning.

As the story dribbled out, it was Masters whose renown outshone that of all the others. The journalists dug back into their files for the story of his trial. Nothing but a dozen lines, and yet, in these dozen lines, a satisfying hint of mystery—a doubt as to his identity, and where he had come from, and why he had killed Beekman, the foreman of the Stonehill construction job.

That was enough. They could imagine the rest.

Overnight, a new Napoleon of the underworld had swam into the public ken.

There were details that set the whole world talking: Masters, after the break, had organized a convict Thanksgiving. Masters had timed his revolt to celebrate Lincoln's Birthday, whereby he had shown that he was not only a killer but a dreamer.

Now, curiously enough, all this was accepted as the truth not only in many fine houses, and crowded trains, and offices in big buildings; but also in those quarters where knowledge of crime is real and intimate: in the police stations, in the dives and backrooms where the professionals of crime are found.

"Three Sevens!"

The name, and the fame that went with it, spread like magic, although often heralded in whispers. Single-handed, Three Sevens had cut his way out of an iron box and captured a prison.

"What manner of man is this!" It was an exclamation paraphrased in all the haunts of drugs and cheap cigarettes, dim lights and bad liquors, in the "jungles" and "hangouts" of thieves and tramps out along the railroad lines; as well as in the offices of police and marshals—especially when the governor himself let it be known that he would pay one thousand dollars' reward for the privilege of seeing this man.

Joan Gracie trembled when she heard of this offer of a reward. She trembled a little, also, when she heard Samuel Green, the deposed warden of San Pedro, swearing that he would devote his life to the tracking down of this man who had humiliated him. The ex-warden had sought for and obtained a commission in the State constabulary. It was a roving commission—and one that he expected to turn to financial profit, as well, for Three Sevens wasn't the

only fugitive from San Pedro with a price on his head.

One week passed, then another.

Joan was in her father's office one afternoon when the telephone bell rang. She was at her father's side. She herself picked up the instrument. There was a "Hello!" Even at that first word she had a thrill. She recognized that voice. She knew that it was a voice that she had been waiting for.

"This is the warden's office."

She wondered if she had been mistaken. Again, she wondered if some one else were recognizing her voice. There came the answer:

"This is Daniel Craig."

Joan turned to her father. She dared not say more than she had said. She surrendered the instrument to her father's outstretched hand.

"It's—he," she said.

And to save herself from she scarcely knew what —just embarrassment, perhaps, self-betrayal, disappointment, sorrow—she hurried from the room.

Was he giving himself up? What had happened? Wouldn't the papers gloat! She went to an open window. It was the window where Craig and she had stood together on that surprising, somewhat unearthly day of her arrival in this place.

Craig himself had learned of this sudden and extraordinary fame of his before he had been away from San Pedro a week. During this week he and the big black man who had become his follower and friend had traveled much of the time at night far from the usual lines of traffic.

In the daytime they camped. They had plenty of food of sorts. George Washington, like so many members of his race, was a natural hunter, with no dependence on the inventions of the white man. This life in the open developed his native qualities, made

of him more of a primitive than ever. The waxing moon became a hunting moon for him. The 'possums were out. The rabbits danced. The poke-weed was like asparagus. In the quiet places of the streams the big suckers fanned lazily.

Nature was preparing her annual banquet, and they were the first guests to arrive. Under this régime of such food as he had craved for months, and the open air and the long sleeps—and more yet, perhaps, in response to the stimulus of a great construction job ahead of him, which was the reconstruction of his own life, Craig got back his health and strength with an amazing celerity.

Then, one night, after careful consideration, Craig, bidding his friend and ally to await developments in case of a misplay, had made his way into a camp they had discovered near an abandoned mine.

There were a dozen men seated about a camp fire. He had recognized one of them as Solly Wells, that late inmate of the San Pedro hospital who had sent the saws to Chi Slim with the aid of which Craig had effected his escape from the cell.

Solly was shriveled and bent. He was now heavily bearded. It was chiefly Solly's cough that had given Craig his clew to Solly's identity, and knowledge that Solly could not be long for this world that decided Craig to resume Solly's acquaintance.

It was from Solly that Craig learned of the fame that had come to him. Solly didn't say so right out. In fact, while others were about, no sign of recognition passed between Craig and Solly at all—none that any one but themselves could have noticed.

Solly had been talking to a grizzled tramp who intermittently hammered at the heel of one of his old shoes with a set of metal knuckles of a kind known to the profession as "London dusters."

"What do you know about Three Sevens?" Solly asked.

"Him?" said the tramp. "He'll be our first president when us grafters comes into our own. I'm on my way to the hobo congress now, if I can ever get this damn heel fixed."

And he hammered away again at his cobbling with his London dusters, as any honest man might do.

"Who's this man Three Sevens?" asked Craig.

His own advent in the crowd about the camp fire had attracted only a mild notice. For the most part they were just ordinary tramps. But, at this question of his every one looked at him with astonishment. The cobbler paused in his work. Solly coughed and laughed and almost strangled. Where'd he hail from? Where'd he been keeping himself? But the cobbler put down his knuckles and brought a sheaf of old newspaper clippings from an inside pocket of his ragged coat.

Craig took off his hat and scratched his head. It was the signal for George Washington to come in from the shadows. There was a reason for this. Solly had found occasion to slip another sort of signal to Craig. The old tramp was not what he seemed.

"A dick," said Solly, meaning a detective.

The three of them—Solly, Craig, and Washington—had crept out of the camp as soon as the others appeared to be asleep.

"And he knew me?"

"Sure. Before I did. He might have jumped you, at that, if you hadn't called George in. He'll forget all about Bud Gaspell, now that he's picked up your trail."

"Bud Gaspell?"

"It was him this dick was tailing—ever since Bud

held up the express the night of his get-away. Bud passed this way two days ago."

"Where is he now?"

"I know where he was headin' for," said Solly.

"Where are you heading for, Solly?"

Solly coughed. He said that all he wanted was to die in the open air, and that could be none too soon to satisfy him.

"You're foolish," said Craig. "You ought to go to a hospital. You could live a long time yet."

"It's a hospital that done this to me," said Solly, coughing.

"Maybe I can work a pardon for you."

"How?"

"By your helping me to turn Bud Gaspell back to San Pedro."

Solly averred that San Pedro was a shade worse than the place where he hoped Warden Green and all his underlings would go when they died.

"But there's a new deal there," said Craig. "If I'd known what was coming off, I wouldn't have started this thing you helped me to start. Take you, for example, and George, here. Both of you would be better off back there with the new warden than out here getting chased through the woods."

"How can we work it?" Solly asked. "What's the lay?"

Fame, scoffed at by certain philosophers ever since some Nimrod of the Stone Age killed the last dinosaur, nonetheless has remained alluring to the hearts of men, and with a reason. She comes with gifts in her hands, as Craig was quick to discover. The gifts are money, power, and privilege. He enjoyed all these gifts within the next three days.

He was traveling alone, then. Solly and the faithful George he had established in a hidden camp in the woods. To them there he sent an emissary with

food and other things for their comfort. He could have sent them a thousand dollars—a thousand dollars apiece—if he had wanted to.

Thanks to Fame. For Solly had told him about a certain neighboring town, and a certain notorious citizen who lived there. Craig called on the notorious citizen—a man who had once served a term in prison on his own account, deservedly—and had changed nothing much but his name on getting out. This man conducted a sort of employment agency, for want of a better term, for those still under the shadow of the law. He could furnish men to either side, or both, in a labor-and-capital dispute, or a political campaign, or could keep a stolen painting hidden for a dozen years—he was an amateur of painting; all this besides financing a first-class gambling house and other enterprises.

"Three Sevens!"

This man was almost for treating Craig as an equal. They could be of vast and mutual benefit to each other later on. So Craig borrowed as much money as he guessed he would need. But best of all, he got the private address of Bud Gaspell, found that Bud was at that address now, and that the place was less than five miles away.

Early the next morning, a trifle before dawn, to be exact, some dwellers in this town that Craig had visited in the night, may have sworn a little when they were awakened by the passing of a junk cart, its passage advertised by a string of jingling sleigh bells. They didn't know that this junk cart was the property of a "fence"—a kind old gentleman who lent the wagon at times to clients of his. They would never have suspected that the kind old gentleman had now lent the wagon to that most famous of all modern criminals, Three Sevens, the new "Napoleon of the Underworld."

But while the sun was still red in the trees, Craig, to the music of the jingling bells—music of the bygone clean and frosty days and nights of his boyhood—discovered the house he had been looking for.

Bud Gaspell was there, as Craig could tell from the blue smoke that streaked up from the chimney. He drew a long breath.

He had come to the first debt set down in the red ledger. What would the payment be?

CHAPTER IX

OLD RAGS!

THERE were a scattered score of buildings in the neighborhood, most of them like the one to which he had been directed, dilapidated cottages once put up by a communistic colony of intellectual insurgents against the general scheme of things. Long since, the intellectuals had disappeared. Their property—which they disclaimed, anyway—had gradually become the home of insurgents of another strain, anarchists, mostly, enemies of society all.

A queer place for a junk dealer to come to, as Craig guessed. He looked neither to the right nor the left as the old horse drew his cart up the rutty road into the settlement, but he knew that he was watched. He also knew as well as if some one had told him so that not without guile would he ever be able to bring Bud Gaspell away from here. Bud also had fame to some extent, also money, and also, therefore, friends who would be willing to take a chance on his account.

"Old rags!"

Craig let out his call as he halted the old horse in front of the little frame cottage he had come to find.

He waited an interval. He got down from his cart. The horse nodded, flicked a fly, prepared to drowse. There was no danger of a runaway. Craig went around to the back door of the cottage. He knocked three times.

There was no answer from within. He dared not

wait too long. He knew that there was a tunnel from the cellar for a quick escape in case of surprise.

"Any old rags?"

He would hate to have Bud get away from him now, with George Washington and Solly Wells waiting for him in their own hiding place twenty miles away.

Then the door opened. Without waiting, Craig slipped through.

Neither did Craig wait, once he was inside. There was just time for the tenant of the cottage to get out a gasp, for Craig had drawn as he entered. He found himself facing a blurred figure in the sudden twilight as he kicked the door shut back of him. The blurred figure resolved itself into that of a man who might have been an overgrown baboon—not very tall, hunched shoulders, but thin through the waist, agile and strong—Bud Gaspell, all right.

"What in the——" Bud began.

"Put 'em up. We'll talk later."

Craig stuck out his left hand cautiously, as Bud raised his own hands. Bud had a dirk in a sheath at his belt. Craig took this. Bud would also have a gun somewhere. Bud had been edging backward, inch by inch. And Craig had never ceased to strain his ears. There had been no way of telling, thus far, whether Bud had been keeping bachelor hall or not.

A draft, a badly balanced pan, a jumping rat—it must have been one of these things—caused a clicking sound off to one side. At the same time, Bud Gaspell let go his pent-up muscles as he might have released a spring. In a moment he and Craig were locked.

Bud had caught Craig's gun hand under his left arm. At the same time, Bud had circled his right arm about Craig's neck, got a grip on Craig's chin.

They went down in a heap, with a softly solid chug, like the fall of a single tightly loaded sack of wheat or flour. Then, silence for a while, as if both were listening for something, then a whimpering of breath and complaining speech.

It wasn't a pretty fight. There was scarcely anything to see. No favorite describer of prize fights, no medaled war correspondent, could have made much of it.

But to one who would have known all the facts of the fight, this very static quality of the struggle would have added to the interest of it. It was like one of those struggles so common elsewhere in nature where two antagonistic growths meet and fight to the death —the strangling liana and the jungle tree, the starfish and the oyster, the king snake and the diamondback. This fight also was silent, deadly, and possibly as important to the final evolution of the world, a part of the same endless struggle for the survival of the fittest.

Which was the fittest here? No telling. Nature and man have different standards, apparently. Nature favors the weeds, man the wheat; nature the wolf, man the hound.

With that twisting, neck-breaking grip that Gaspell had on Craig's neck and jaw, a calm observer—had there been one—would have said that the odds favored Gaspell. Craig was helpless. He couldn't even kick, for the train robber had locked his legs into Craig's with the same sort of a bone-cracking effort.

But in Craig's mind there was no doubt. He couldn't lose. He was in the right. Consciously, or unconsciously, there poured into his heart a knowledge and a purpose that Gaspell couldn't have known. There was Joan Gracie back there in the outside world. The world was new. The world was to be his, Craig's, and all that it contained. With a per-

fect sureness of what the result would be, Craig had shoved his left fist up between himself and Gaspell.

It was like trying to force his fist between two logs in a jam. But his fist won a little way, a little way more.

Silence, all this time, except for that occasional whimper—from which one of them probably neither of them knew—for the working knowledge of each of them was concentrated in this small compass of their two bodies.

Then Craig's fist had reached Gaspell's chin. It kept pushing. It went another inch, yet another inch.

Craig was still confident even when he discovered that he could no longer breathe, when he felt that his blood had become a boiling torrent in his head. He felt a certain confidence even when he guessed that it might be like this that he was going to die. For, after all, what did it matter whether he died or not so long as he was doing what was right? And then, as swiftly as possible the shock of death itself might have come to him, he was aware that Gaspell's hold on his neck was relaxing and that his own fist was still pushing up—and back—under Gaspell's jaw. And straightway it occurred to Craig that the result of the battle could never have been in doubt at all—not in the least.

With no great relaxing of the tension, he worked his arm slowly from under Gaspell's arm. But there was no occasion either to strike or shoot. Craig saw that he had fought better than he knew. Perhaps there was an inspiration in fighting—as there was, or as there was reported to be, in the writing of great songs. Anyway, he saw it now—he had been pressing, not Gaspell's chin so much as Gaspell's throat, the vital cartilage of his Adam's apple.

Thus, in the brief time that the fight had lasted,

Gaspell's thick and hairy hawser that moored him to the shores of life had been reduced to a single, fragile thread.

Those furtive neighbors of Gaspell's had heard no sound. Presently they had seen the junk dealer come from the cottage alone. He led his old horse and cart with no great haste around to the back of the cottage. Again he entered. When he emerged the next time, it was with something wrapped in burlap—a staggering load—one that might have been the body of a man, or a dozen mail pouches done into a package, or nothing at all but a mattress.

It was evident that nothing had happened—nothing of consequence. The smoke still rose peacefully from the chimney. And Gaspell was not the man to receive visitors unless he cared to.

They suspected nothing amiss on the following day, when the chimney showed no smoke, nor later, when it gradually became known by the underground telegraph that served them for much of their social interchange that Gaspell had departed.

Neighbors were continually drifting away like that. It wasn't considered unneighborly that he hadn't said good-by.

But, in the meantime, Craig had joined Solly Wells and the black deputy in the woods where he had left them. And then, there began one of the strangest treks in the history of any men. For Craig held on to the old horse and wagon. To some extent he remained the old-rag merchant. He was famous. Or, at least, Three Sevens was famous; and no detective, unless he possessed more than the usual lot of imagination, was going to look for Three Sevens in a business like this.

All the while he came back, closer and closer, to the prison from which he and these others had escaped.

Bud Gaspell made the ride in the bottom of the wagon. All of the time Bud was tied. A part of the time he was gagged. But they made it as easy as possible for him. And, at that, he was but little more uncomfortable than were George Washington and Solly Wells much of the time. For there were periods when they had to play "old rags," too—face down in the bottom of the cart, a coverlet of old burlap over them. With a touch of poetry, a touch of symbolism, to it all—as if they were old rags, sure enough, bound for some paper mill of the gods, where they were to be made over, belike, into something clean, something new, so Craig told them.

However, it may have been when he was having that fight of his with Bud Gaspell, and earlier yet, when that revolution in San Pedro was first dawning in his mind, Craig did have his flights of inspiration now.

In another way than any newspaperman had ever represented, he had become a leader of men—leader of himself, for one, and of these others for the rest.

He understood their waverings, their shudderings, their black haunts and sudden panics as they drew nearer and nearer to their journey's end. He felt these things himself—down in the dark subcellar of his being—which was like the punishment block of the old San Pedro itself. For was not this where were sent the rebel thoughts, the untamable, the fierce, the blasphemous thoughts, like so many prisoners?

It was why, at a little crossroads store, with San Pedro not more than ten miles away out across the arid country he remembered so well, that Craig left the camp guarded by his deputies and went to have a talk with the new warden of San Pedro by telephone.

For his own part, Major Gracie also meditated. Was this a trap? He had talked to a man with a

pleasant voice, a man of education, who gave his name as Daniel Craig.

No, it could be no trap. Daniel Craig was suggesting that the major bring as many guards with him as the major might desire—to a certain gully not far from the prison where there were a number of stunted willow trees.

What for? A conference.

"About the surrender of certain fugitives," came the explanation. "I am Daniel Craig. You have no record concerning me. I may ask you to assure these men that I am bringing with me that they'll not be mistreated—that they'll get a square deal."

The major was honest. Said he:

"What if I should recognize you? And what if it should be my sworn duty to arrest you."

"I'll be masked."

Everything is simple when explained—almost everything. Event follows event, like links in a chain, each event welded into the event that precedes and the link that follows. There are no sudden gaps, no miracles of results without causation.

The new warden of San Pedro, with some strain of the artist in him, perhaps—that quality which gave him both a love for things as they ought to be and for the picturesque—had ordered his horse saddled, had ridden out into the sun-cooked plain that stretched from San Pedro to the south. There, on a crest of rock near his place of rendezvous, he had seen appear the single figure he was expecting; and he rode forward to meet this man with a certain tingling of admiration as well as of curiosity, although the man was masked.

It was good to be young. The man of the mask was young. He must be. What older man would have undertaken this fool's errand than he who had tried, without warrant of law, to set the wrongs of

the law aright? For the major would not listen to the voice inside of him. But this voice was persistent, all the same. What it said was this:

"You're a pretty warden! Going out to meet a man with a mask on his face! And this man with a price on his head! Three Sevens!"

But this inner voice of the major's grew less insistent before very long. The warden was listening instead to the voice of this man he had come to see. This man was telling him how there was a colored man named George Washington, who was not bad at heart, only a bit undisciplined, and how George was coming back to San Pedro of his own free will because he—George—believed in prisons, when prisons were good. And, next, the man was telling about Solly Wells, who had wanted to die in the open air, but also was returning to prison because—well, maybe the law had been vindicated in Solly's case, and there would be a pardon. And then, there was Bud Gaspell.

"And how about Bud?" asked the major.

He had dropped the bridle over his horse's head, dismounted, and now he and Craig were squatted side by side in the bright sunshine like a couple of friendly rangers. Off up the gully three or four hundred yards away, only partly hidden by the stunted willow trees, the major saw an old horse hitched to an old wagon. Also the major had seen those lurking figures back of the wagon—a small man heavily bearded, a big colored man. But the major's glance had been casual.

His glance was casual now, as he glanced at the man at his side. The gray eyes were calm and bright. They gazed away.

"Bud's a hard case," said the man who had given his name as Daniel Craig.

Maybe the major was thinking of the reticences of

his daughter when she had spoken of the man who had organized the San Pedro jail delivery. The major had not sought to question too far. He had faith in his daughter. He had faith in humanity in general. To the major, privately, this was Thomas Masters, late convict No. 3777. To the major, as warden of San Pedro, this man at his side was Daniel Craig, a man whom he had never heard about, a man who was innocent of all wrongdoing—even if he did have a handkerchief tied over the lower part of his face.

It was a confusing situation. Major Gracie solved it by sticking to the essentials of the present situation.

"Bud's a hard case," said Craig, "but even so, I don't believe I'd ever have brought him back if I hadn't known that San Pedro had changed."

"It's changed all right," said the new warden.

"That's what I kept telling the boys, but I'm glad to hear you confirm it. That's going to make me feel a lot better when I go about the rest of the work I have to do—which will be plenty."

"A good deal has been left to my discretion," said the major. "I may come asking board for myself some day."

It was curious to hear them talking like this, friendly and intimate. It would have been still more curious to one who looked at them—this man with a handkerchief tied over the lower part of his face seated there on the ground at the side of the governor's friend.

They talked a while about Bud. He was a hard problem as Craig had said. Bud hadn't wanted to come back to San Pedro. It was only after long persuasion that he had confessed where he had hidden his loot from train No. 93.

"And you——"

"Yes, we brought that with us, too."

"And what is your idea now, Daniel Craig?" asked the major.

"Well, I'll tell you," said Craig. "I thought that maybe you would think it a nice thing, and something in favor of these boys, if you just let them come back to San Pedro without escort—saving the State the expense of the rewards, and so forth. This is where they belong—prison's where they do belong, but let it be somehow, as if they were coming home!"

That part of it turned out as Craig and the major agreed that it should before they parted. And, somehow or other, a part of the story did leak out and get into the papers, where it was treated as bordering on the miraculous.

Two of the fugitives from San Pedro, said the papers, had appeared at the prison one day bringing Bud Gaspell, the train robber, with them, and also an old horse and wagon, with Bud's most recent loot in it.

All very mysterious—and rightly so, for any one not in possession of all the facts. But, even in possession of all the facts, could one have explained that glow of excitement and pride in Joan Gracie's heart when she heard of the adventure? Excitement and pride on her father's account, of course. But then, why should she have ridden out into the desert space back of San Pedro, that day of her father's conference, and gazed and gazed away into the distance? Not even she herself could have told.

She was on the top of a rising bit of ground when she saw an old horse appear trailing a shaky old wagon. Driving the horse was a man who coughed. Seated in the back of the wagon was a man who seemed to have his hands tied. Back of the cart a big negro flat-footed along with a step not devoid of the singing quality of his race.

Then she saw another man. He had come from a

hollow. He shook hands with the driver of the cart. He shook hands with the negro. He watched them go. He stood there until they were out of sight.

Then, for the first time he saw the girl who had been watching him. There must have been a good half mile between them. But who can tell what tricks other than that of mere telepathy the mind can play? There for an interval it may have seemed to both Joan Gracie and Daniel Craig that they were once more face to face.

She waved her hand. He answered her. There were tears in her eyes as she wheeled her horse and started back to San Pedro. Still, she must have known that they were to meet again and again—until the debts of the little ledger were paid.

CHAPTER X

SANCHO

CRAIG, taking thought, knew that the power was in him—a queer feeling that all men and women may know some time. There was something more than a signal of good fellowship in that salute the girl had given him. It was an exaltation. This was the power.

He had a general knowledge as to what part of the world Sancho Red had fled to. Not back to the arid hills of the Southwest that Joan Gracie had indexed after his name, had Sancho fled. No. But Gaspell had given information in that connection. Bud and Sancho had resolved to make a team of it. That was while they were still in prison. And Sancho had told Bud that he was too much wanted in his native Southwest to make that part of the map attractive. Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona—they all wanted Sancho. In all these States he had done murder, and possibly some other things a trifle worse.

No wonder the girl had shuddered a little when she wrote out Sancho's record.

"I'll have to get him next and quick," said Craig in his heart. "The others can wait a while. They're apt to hide out long enough for me to get to them before they increase their debt to society—and mine."

Not so, Sancho. It made Craig, himself, shudder a little now, when he thought of what Sancho might be doing this very day, might have done already in the brief liberty that had thus far been given him.

Craig made for the Mississippi, and started south,

working as a deck hand on one steamer after another, working on no one steamer long, stopping off wherever towns or new labor camps gave promise of information.

Once or twice he guessed that he was followed, but this didn't worry him greatly. The river was a maze—a maze of wide days and unlighted nights—spread out between the frontiers of the States, each State jealous of its rights, plantation owners and steamboat men all jealous of their labor—labor scarce enough without prowling deputy sheriffs making it scarcer yet by unsolicited activity.

Perhaps there was something in that thing the newspapers had said about his being the "Napoleon of the Underworld." There was an underworld even along these river boats—in levee saloons and dance halls, in show boats and shanty boats, on raft and barge and freight deck, wherever the vagrants of the big river assembled. And in all these places Craig found that he could be certain of both friendship and honors by the simple announcement of his name, his prison name, Three Sevens.

No one disputed him. Maybe there was that look about him that advertised the fact that here was the man who had done all that had been reported of Thomas Masters, late of San Pedro. Some one, filled with river gin, tried to dispute it one night—it was in the bar of a floating blind tiger—but they threw the heretic overboard, and Craig himself was the only one who would rescue him.

This heretic was a small man, cross-eyed, given to grinning. He was not one that Craig, or any man, would have looked to for gratitude. Perhaps he meant no gratitude. Perhaps the service he rendered Craig in return was altogether selfish.

But he told Craig about a new lumber camp over in the cypress of the bayou country where labor was

so precious and scarce, and the lumber company so powerful, that the only thing a sheriff would arrest a man for, over there, was the crime of leaving the job.

"How about the Federal marshals," asked Craig, "and the detectives and sheriffs from other States?"

"Settin' around the company's fence like buzzards," said the cross-eyed man. "They know the reservation's full of their meat—men from the chain gangs of a dozen States. The company treats 'em fine, these officers. Likes to have 'em there. Keeps the boys on the job. But, no sir! Let one of them Yankee marshals try to take a man away, company'd leave him out in the woods as quick as it'd leave an ordinary man who tried it."

The cross-eyed man was headed for this place. As yet he didn't say why. But he had a skiff—he called it a pirogue—and knew the way. He begged Craig to go along for company.

Craig accepted. Perhaps it was the fascination of Pahkaville that was luring Craig's friend. The little man talked about Pahkaville. It appeared that Pahkaville was also part of the lumber company's domain—founded complete on a mud island far out in the deep swamp of the cypress country, as a further inducement, no doubt, for labor to come and remain. For it would take more than mere sheriffs and marshals to keep men at the killing work of the cypress slashings even at high pay, without other inducements.

It was late one night, when they had drifted and paddled all one day through a forest that couldn't have been wilder in De Soto's day, that they got their first glimmer of the lights of Pahkaville, far off through the blue gloom of the water. A little later, there came the faint strains of music—fiddle, drum, and guitar.

"Saturday night," said the cross-eyed man. "I reckon they're having a ball."

"And I reckon that'll suit you?" said Craig.

"I reckon I won't stop."

"Stop now," said Craig pointedly.

The little man sat motionless. They were on a rather broad stretch of water. There glinted through Craig's mind the odd thought that perhaps this little man with the cross eyes was a detective after all.

"Who are you, anyway?" asked Craig softly.

"My real name is Sanders."

"What's your business?"

There was no use conducting a conversation like this without a show of proper authority. Craig's hand was at his side.

"I'm a paper hanger," said Mr. Sanders. "I had a brother who was a sheep-herder."

"What's that got to do with it?"

There was a long pause. An owl hooted. Underneath this big sound, like fireflies under the moon, there came the tinkle and drub of the Pahkaville orchestra. It was to this accompaniment, and the even more fitting accompaniment of the silence, that the little man spoke.

"Stranger, I'll tell you. I ain't prying into your business. If you're a detective, yourself, you can't say I didn't tell you what the company's apt to do to detectives that try to interfere with their men. If you ain' a detective—if you're a man that's had an accident——"

"How do you mean?"

"—and are a man who has shed human blood—you can't say I didn't tell you what a good place Pahkaville and the slashin's are to hide out in. No offense, stranger!"

"Go on."

"Four years ago a man killed my brother, and I

started out to kill *him*. I didn't have the nerve. Then this man got put in jail, and I laid off. But last week I heard he had broke jail and come to Pahkaville. When I saw you and heard you was lookin' for this same man, I 'lowed I'd turn the job of gettin' him over to you. I brought you to Pahkaville hoping you'd kill Sancho Red. I know it's my own sacred duty, but"—his teeth began to chatter—"I'll tell you honest, I'm skeert!"

"Well, well, well," said Craig.

"Are you a detective?"

"Sort of."

"And you *are* after Sancho Red?"

"Yes."

"Then kill him," said Mr. Sanders, "before he kills you. Neither he nor the company'll ever let you arrest him otherwise nohow."

"Mr. Sanders," said Craig, "if I take this job, or the equivalent of this job, off your hands, are you willing to help me some?"

The cross-eyed man raised his right hand in the blue gloom.

Those who knew Sancho Red best said that his mother was an Apache and his father a Mexican. His looks supported this theory of descent, granted his father was one of the big Mexicans—of which there are not a few. Sancho was big. Nor was this bigness a mere matter of height, although he was all of six feet. He was big of bone and breadth. He had stupendous shoulders. His face was big, although when you looked at it, or remembered it, you were chiefly impressed by his small, glittering eyes and the extremely wide, cruelly curved mouth.

Also like the cottonmouth snake, it was in the nature of Sancho neither to run nor to toil. His lay was to bask, take things easy, with no activity outside his restless, small eyes and the restless small brain

back of these eyes, until such time as a victim should come his way. Then a blow—and gluttony—and more luxurious repose.

There was something peculiarly fitting in the fact that since coming to the secretive kingdom of the Pahkaville Lumber Company he had established a small gambling joint—with another and nimbler man to operate it, himself to rule it and take the profits.

Pahkaville was what they call wide open. There were all sorts of attractions there of a kind strong men hanker for. It was like what must have been one of those old towns of the Caribbean, when the Buccaneers were running things—all colors here and there, white and yellow, tawny and black—a sprinkling of Chinese, Malays, and Filipinos, from the Gulf Coast; Creoles, Spanish, French, and Portuguese; blond squareheads from the big woods of the North, black refugees from chain gangs and turpentine camps, white adventurers waiting for some new Skagway to call them, and men like Sancho, drawn to a place like this as are snakes to a water hole when the summer droughts begin.

Craig looked Sancho over, without himself being seen. Craig had no difficulty in lining up a job for himself. There was engineering enough for a regiment of engineers out among the big trees of that swamp—tracks to lay, cables to rig, these changing and extending from day to day as the slashings bit deeper into the wet jungle. Each night Craig came back to the spendthrift hilarity of Pahkaville, joined the crowds in the "plaza," the town's one public square and street. A primitive place as ever was—filled with primitive people, man and woman—and Sancho Red in his element.

Sancho's gambling joint was an open front shed, with a faro layout at the rear. Back of this, in an-

other shed, entirely closed, Sancho had his personal den.

"Fire would drive him out," said Craig to himself.

But fire also might drive all Pahkaville out as well. All the buildings in it were built of raw lumber—most of it so filled with turpentine that it would have burned in a rainstorm, almost. To avoid fire, the company had long since abolished kerosene and lamps. There was electric light for all who wanted it, and arc lamps hung from the serpentine branches of the live oaks over the plaza at night.

There was not only an abundance of artificial light in this city of darkness. There was no lack of police, either—here where outlaw games and drink ran their course and outlaw men found shelter. Nights particularly, Pahkaville was patrolled by the company's own police—men with a talent for killing, who prowled about, watchful but restless like hungry cats.

One of these men had good-naturedly relieved Craig of his gun. It was the night of Craig's arrival. Mr. Sanders had no gun. They had left their pirogue in a creek that ran around back of the island on which Pahkaville was built.

"So no one's apt to do any shooting around here," said Craig.

The policeman smiled grimly. "If there's any shootin' to be done," said the policeman, "the company likes to do it itself. You see, we don't like to lose our hands."

"Suppose a couple of the hands get unfriendly."

"That does happen. Not often. We generally manage to keep order. We don't like to lose our men."

"What's to keep them from hurting each other with razors and things?"

"Nothing! Nothing! They do get at each other, now and then, with an ax, or a cant hook, or a stick of wood. Only, we discourage it. We try to keep every one good-natured. Fellow who starts anything like that generally disappears before long."

The policeman drifted away, lean and watchful, like a cat.

"We'll have to be careful," said Mr. Sanders.

"Mighty careful."

"Even if we done somethin' to Sancho, and they found it out——"

"They mustn't find out," said Craig. "The thing for you to do is to forget what you're here for. They'll be glad to have you work in the store. Both of us will sleep in the bunk house with the rest of the men for a while, and we'll eat in the mess house."

"I ain't aimin' to find out," said the little man apologetically, "but what did you say was the name I'm to use in addressin' you, sir?"

"My own name, Daniel Craig; and not 'sir.' We're partners."

The two of them fell into the life of this queer city of the woods without attracting attention. Newcomers were not rare. Nor was it in keeping with local etiquette to ask questions. The town drowsed by day, flamed into life at night with the return of the swampers.

Each night Sancho sat impassive in the back of his den, while his little black eyes flicked at all who came and went. Days, he slept and ate. He had an inordinate capacity for food and sleep. He was growing bigger.

It was in the daytime, while Sancho slept, that Craig and Mr. Sanders finally took up their quarters in a new small cabin that had been built for them beyond that of Sancho, right on the edge of the island. Close under the cabin they had moored the pirogue

that had brought them here. Day by day they accumulated stores in their cabin of a kind and quantity to last them a long sojourn in the woods, once they should care to leave.

Sancho Red, himself, had not looked on this advent of a neighbor without disfavor, but he was mollified when he saw Mr. Sanders and learned that he was clerk in the company store.

He was more mollified yet, when Mr. Sanders let him know that there were nights when there was as much as ten thousand dollars in the company safe, and that he possessed the combination.

For things had been occurring to bother Sancho—things that he could not understand, things which gave him a nostalgia for the arid hills of his home range and the completer safety that the solitude of those hills promised him. It was all very well here in the crowd for a while, but his nature called for solitude, especially when he sensed this danger that he could not understand.

Twice, now, he had found the print of a bloody hand on the sack of moss he used as a pillow. There was blood on the latch of his door. Then, one night, toward dawn, when he had just fallen asleep, he was jabbed through with such ferocious pain that he jumped out of his cot sure that he had been bitten by a snake. It wasn't that he saw when he turned on the light. It was more blood. There was blood everywhere.

There was nothing nervous about Sancho. He wasn't even very superstitious. Even so, had he been an ordinary man in other respects, Sancho might have deserted his cabin then and gone to sleep in the company barracks. But this was the one place that Sancho did fear. To go to sleep in the presence of strangers, any one of whom might be a deadly enemy,

was almost impossible; the thought gave him a shudder, anyway.

But the prodding of the blood and the pain in his cabin, and the lure of partnership with a defenseless small man in a ten-thousand-dollar job succeeded in getting Sancho—not so much like a snake now, as an overfed bull alligator—from this swamp hole of his.

Later, when new tenants came to occupy Sancho's deserted cabin and the deserted cabin next door, on the edge of the bayou, they were to speculate on a crude tunnel, half filled with water, that connected the two shacks, and the electric-light wires that ran through this. The tunnel came up in the corner of Sancho's cabin right where his floor cot had been. It was thus that the tunnel was found. The darky making over the cot had got an electric shock.

But meantime, other things had happened to Sancho. He had watched one night while Mr. Sanders brought the last satchel from the cabin on the edge of the bayou. It was in the deep dark, before dawn. Then the two of them had entered the pirogue, which Mr. Sanders silently rowed.

They went away across the dark waters that lay amid the cypress.

"I can kill him when I feel like it," said Sancho to himself.

There was a touch of luxury, as fine as any Sancho had ever known, in thus letting his victim work for him—the victim helping to rob himself, helping in the murder of himself.

Sancho must have smiled in the dark. It was his sort of a joke.

CHAPTER XI

LIVE FREIGHT

BUT Craig had learned his lesson when he was fighting Bud Gaspell, and he had reflected on it often since. The moment he had clinched with Bud, he and Bud were on the same level—with the chances in favor of Bud, for Bud would have been most willing to kill, while Craig himself was loath. It was a lesson that abided with him when he confronted the problem of taking Sancho Red in tow. A fight with Sancho would have been like a fight with a snake or a 'gator, in very truth, and all the chances, this time, on Sancho's side.

And Craig didn't want to die. Never had he taken such thought of life, never so regarded it as a definite and limited trust, or heritage, to be used to its utmost value.

He knew it—that he was as willing as any man to risk his life or give it outright, should the time ever come when this would be necessary. But to risk it uselessly——

He let his thought taper off, as he heard a splash of oars.

He was standing there in the pitch darkness on the edge of a narrow cut a good mile from Pahkaville. The cut was so narrow that he could have jumped across it had he cared to, or had he been able to see the other bank. But the water in it was deep enough to float the pirogue. He heard soft voices as the pirogue entered the cut.

"Are you sure you know the way?" That was Sancho.

"Sure!" That was Mr. Sanders.

"Why don't you stick to the open water?"

"I'm afraid we'll be followed."

"They won't find out what you done till to-morrow."

"Maybe some of the company's shoo-fly cops have got wise."

"They'd 'a' pinched you."

"No, they'd have doped out a better plan."

"What?"

"Laid for me out in the woods, so's to shoot me and get the swag for themselves." There was a silence.

Craig wondered if that rudimentary brain of Sancho's wasn't occupied, just a little bit, with the blood-stains on the wall, the shooting pains that had disturbed his sleep.

He heard the sheep-herder's brother speak again:

"I think they've been suspecting me, anyway."

"You never told me so," said Sancho softly.

"I was skeert you'd back out," said the little man. "No one likes to get a bullet through his chest."

"Shut up!"

"It makes him spit blood."

"Not so loud."

"Like a brother of mine."

"Where?"

"New Mexico."

"Shut up—and pull."

"I'm pullin'; but I can't forget him as I found him in the rocks at daybreak. Some one had flashed a light in his eyes——"

"Hah!"

Right then there was a flash of light in Sancho's eyes. It struck him and bathed him like a bath of cold fire. It held him as he groped up with his hands in a blinded effort to shut the light out. At the

same time the little man who had been rowing the boat swung over with an oar and brought it down, crashing on Sancho's head. And that settled Sancho for a while.

"I told you not to hit him so hard," said Craig.

"I couldn't help it," said Mr. Sanders. "I was thinking about my brother."

"You may have killed him."

"Oh, wouldn't that be fine! God bless you!"

"Hold on," said Craig. "I think he's coming to. Now, bring his other hand up behind him like this. Now his feet."

They trussed up Sancho Red as Craig had once seen alligator hunters truss up a big bull of a saurian they had taken alive—not only his hands and his feet were tied, but half-hitches every few inches were thrown over his arms and legs.

It was just as well. Sancho made some unreasoning efforts to free himself, as soon as he had his consciousness back. He doubled his great body and flopped about like a fish. He had the same sort of life in him that all such animals have, low in the scale of creation. Life, and the instinctive struggle for life was implanted in every cell, not all concentrated in the brain, as happens when the top of the ladder of creation is reached.

Once they were sure that the cords would hold, they let him flop. They watched him curiously. Dispassionately they listened to his blasphemies. It suited them that he should weaken himself.

They had brought him far beyond the last of the cypress slashings, to a camp Craig himself had established. It was on a little knoll, or hummock, right in the midst of the deep swamp—a place of mystery and charm, full of slanting light and green shadows, perfumed with wild orange, gay with bird song, and touched with the spectral passage of silent butterflies.

Here Craig slept four hours, and let his spirit go out in his dreams over the long, back trail to San Pedro, and the girl who was there. Then he watched four hours while Mr. Sanders slept. It was going to be watch-and-watch like that all the time that they were on the trail with this wild animal captive of theirs. But they would tame him.

Sancho, however, was to display his enormous resistance. For almost two whole days he even refused water—gurgling and cursing when they poured water into his mouth. He would take no food. He would lie quiet for hours, then they would see his great body writhing again. Once, in that first forty-eight hours, Craig loosed Sancho's bonds, and Sancho almost escaped. So Craig drew the ropes tight again.

The pirogue brought the three of them out of the cypress country at last. It was not more than a week later when a small man, cross-eyed, appeared before the station agent of Bayou Crossing and told him a story. He said that he had a mule of value that he wanted to take back home, to San Pedro, some five or six hundred miles to the north; and, to this end, he wanted to hire a box car.

"That's easy," said the station agent. "All you'll need is the price."

The little man was evidently well supplied with money. He ought to have been. What money had been Sancho's was now his, and he was using it—for Sancho's own good. The store had not been robbed.

"And I've got a friend who's goin' with me," said the little man. "We're goin' to travel and sleep in the car."

There *was* a mule. It was a mule that the little man had bought in a neighboring parish. A fairly good mule, but it made the station agent laugh a

little when he saw it. Funny what exalted values the owners of live stock put on their animals at times—almost as if the mule, or the horse, or the cow, or whatever it happened to be—was a member of the family. But, shucks! Hadn't he seen fairly good men shot in a dispute over the possession of a mere houn' dog? He had.

He billed the car and the mule through to San Pedro. He didn't see that other bit of live stock that was put into the car that night.

The idea that there might have been some such thing never occurred to the station agent at all—not until almost a week later, when a couple of strange detectives who had been hanging around Pahkaville showed up and asked him questions about a man who might have looked like the famous bandit, Three Sevens.

On the strength of what the station agent told them, the detectives began to use the telegraph.

It may have been that ex-warden Samuel Green of San Pedro came the nearest of any one to solving the mystery that enveloped Three Sevens. Once the big man with the beard had had a daughter of his own. He no longer claimed her as his own, wasn't sure, as a matter of fact, whether she was still alive or not. But this he knew, that there had been no change since Solomon's day of the way of a man with a maid.

A word here and a word there, and he had come to imagine, or see with the eye of his mind—something of what had passed that day when the new warden's daughter and convict No. 3777 had been in the prison practically alone. A word here and a word there, and he had got a glimmering of the truth concerning the return of those other convicts—George Washington, Solly Wells, and Bud Gaspell.

The warden, all by himself, through a mental process all his own—never having read a book in his

life—had found an adage of his own to take the place of that famous phrase in French criminal procedure: *"Cherchez la femme!"* Mr. Green's version was: "There's a woman in it!"

To be quite frank about it—as the ex-warden was frank with himself—he hoped for the worse. Wouldn't a bit of scandal like that be great? Wouldn't it? Wouldn't that blot out, as with a thick cloud, his own ignominious wind-up at San Pedro?

Then, just a little too late, the ex-warden got a tip. It was a tip given him by a railroad telegrapher at Banner Junction with whom Green had conserved friendly relations.

The telegrapher showed him a telegram he had received, which told of a certain box car that had been billed through to San Pedro.

The warden's mind began to work—began to play, first of all, around that pet theory of longing of his of some sort of scandalous relationship existing between the present warden's daughter and this fugitive. Three Sevens was taking this means of coming back to see the girl.

But there was something the matter with this theory, too. If the girl was in love with the fellow, she would have run off and joined the fugitive where they would have been safer. Girls were like that. He knew. Didn't he have his own daughter, Amy, to go by?

There was something else the ex-warden didn't understand. He knew Masters and he knew Sancho Red—knew them in certain aspects better than any man did. And, there was no denying it; the two men weren't mates, never could be. Maybe they both were man-killers. That made no difference. They were not the twain to go riding around the country together, trusting each other, helping each other to outwit detectives.

Then there crept into Mr. Green's mind an additional ray of light. He recalled that interview of his with Three Sevens the day of the big get-away —what Masters had said about freeing those only who deserved to go free.

He saw the truth. He saw it even when, like many another man confronted by the truth, he wouldn't admit that it was the truth. No! No! No! The idea that convict No. 3777 should now be risking his skin merely to turn in another convict, and this convict one of the most dangerous of them all—that, too, was absurd.

Nonetheless, the ex-warden got busy. He was not without friends and influence in the county where he had lived so long and turned over petty graft and favors of a sort for so many years. He organized a posse all his own, by phone and telegraph.

What was the big idea? Was he expecting another jail delivery? Why should he want the boys to surround San Pedro so secretly, and wait, and wait? Green wouldn't explain. He himself started for San Pedro.

Less than an hour ago the accommodation freight had, sure enough, dropped a box car at the San Pedro siding. The car was still there. From the half gate guarding the open door of the car a mule stretched out an intelligent, interrogating head.

The ex-warden was sitting in a small and rusty auto which he used for his longer jaunts about the country, although he preferred a horse. He was a fine figure on a horse—much finer than when crumpled up in his little automobile. But he had no thought now for his appearance at all. He sat in his auto and looked at the freight car and the mule. There they were, as if confirming all those suspicions and half-formulated theories and longings that were squirming in his heart and brain.

While the ex-warden of San Pedro looked and looked, so did Craig.

He was still in the car. In the end of it, near the roof, there was a little square window. The wooden shutter of this was tilted up an inch or so. Under this he could see the wide, gray prospect of the prison wall, and then, pasted against this like a poster, the dusty little auto with the big ex-warden in it.

For a moment or so there seemed to be a great silence—a silence so intense that it seemed to Craig as if he were back in the dark cell again, listening to the reverberating hum of the prison power plant.

Wouldn't it be strange if the dark cell should receive him again? Yet, didn't the bright dream of every life after a manner, end like that—in the grave?

CHAPTER XII

THE SECOND VERSION

THERE were two versions of the capture of Sancho Red, as told by the remarkable Mr. Sanders. Perhaps this was because the little man, on his arrival at San Pedro, finding himself so easily and swiftly behind the steel and stone portals of the prison, was a bit confused.

He told a keeper, and later told the warden himself, that he was an honest man, and that, as such he had discovered Sancho Red at liberty and had simply decided to bring him back.

"You?" demanded Major Gracie.

"Me!"

The man was so small, so nervous, that there was a tragic humor in his claim. His crossed eyes glinted. He grinned.

"I had intended to kill him myself, but——"

"I'm glad you didn't," said the major.

"He had killed my brother," said Sanders.

Gracie had led the little man almost straight to the warden's office from the prison gate. In the warden's mind now there repeated itself various details of that amazing message of warning and inquiry he had received that same morning from the detectives who had gone to Pahkaville. The detectives had stated that there were two men. True, they had sent but vague descriptions.

"And you took him single-handed?"

"Almost."

"How do you mean, 'almost?'"

"There was a friend who helped me."

"Will you tell me his name?"

"Yes, sir. He told me to tell you his name was Daniel Craig."

"Ah!"

The little man looked about him, made sure that there was none to overhear.

"He said—Mr. Craig did—that I could trust you and tell you the story as I have told it, and ask you to let it go at that."

The warden nodded. He remembered the youth with the handkerchief over his face, remembered the clear eyes, remembered certain things his daughter had said about the man who had led the San Pedro revolt and then had defended her against a possible mob when the convicts were getting out of hand. And that was about all until they had brought in Red himself, trussed and gagged.

The version continued:

"But why this? Why the mule car?"

"I had no extradition papers," said Sanders. "We—that is I didn't want to muss with detectives. It would only have resulted in some one getting killed and in Sancho's getting away."

"You've almost killed him, yourself."

"He's in good condition. He's tough. He'll get over it."

Sancho let out a roar. They had brought him into the prison office. He couldn't stand, but his voice was strong—so strong that at first there was no telling what he said. Then he was shrieking murder, and asking them to let him go back—just for a moment—long enough to kill the blankety-blank and so-forth scoundrel who had brought him to this, Three Sevens!

"He thinks I'm Three Sevens," suggested the little man, grinning.

"You lie——" and then more incoherency.

Sanders began to tremble, show nerves again. It had been a long strain. He was under a strain still. He said that he would go and water his mule, which was in great need of water.

Various other reports also had been coming into San Pedro from far and near. Major Gracie reviewed these reports in his mind all the time that he was hearing the words that this strange and shaky little volunteer shouted over the sudden uproar of Sancho Red. They bore Red away.

Not until Sancho Red was gone did Joan Gracie appear. She knew all about those reports her father had been getting—especially that last report of all from the detectives who had gone to Pahkaville. She also heard what the little man had to say about watering his mule.

A keeper just then came back to the office with a white smile. Sancho Red was making up for lost time in the matter of violence, the keeper said. Would the major come and give advice. The major hurried away.

Joan and the little man were alone.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"Who?"

"The man who managed this."

"I—I—you mean——"

"You can speak openly to me. Quick! There's no time to lose. I'm his friend."

"He's in the car."

"There's a posse going through the country all around the prison."

"He knows it."

"Why did he come so far?"

"He didn't want to leave me alone with Sancho."

"He could have wired for help."

"We've been suspected all along the line for the past fifty miles."

"What was his plan?"

"To wait till night and then ride away on the mule."

"He'll never make it."

"You don't know him, not the way I do—the way he caught old Red—gentled him as much as he could—kept me from killin' him——" And herewith came the second version, the truth this time, from the start to the finish, even the fact that the little man was not named Sanders, but Jones.

He had changed his name because he had expected to kill or get killed, and didn't want the name of Jones dishonored again. "He's helped me a lot—has Mr. Craig. I don't want him took."

"Hurry," said Joan. "Tell him that the chief danger's outside the prison, not in. But he'll know that." She put a small fist against her lips, let herself go in thought. "Go back to the car," she said. "Get word to him that everything's all right. I'll send a squad of men with orders to push the car into the prison yard."

Mr. Sanders suspected a trick.

"I'd rather go to the pen myself," he faltered. "If it wasn't for him——"

"Can't you see that I'm also his friend?"

"Yes, ma'am; but——"

She was still trying to formulate her plan while she was already getting the first part of it out. There were so many complications in the way of clear thinking—loyalty to Craig, loyalty to her father, and a whole flock of memories, a flock of hopes, too, perhaps, and both hopes and memories beating about like supernatural birds in the golden blaze of a new sunrise.

Then an old trusty—old Eddie Yarmouth, who

himself was some sort of a living shadow of Craig—had opened the door, and looked in.

"This way, sir," said Eddie, speaking to a visitor as yet unseen.

Joan looked up, some swift intuition informing her that a shadow had announced the coming event. Her breath was caught. Her heart was palpitant. Or was it merely the odd expression on Eddie Yarmouth's face that caused her to feel like that? There had been a curious, haunted look on Eddie's face. There still was, now, as Eddie stepped back to let the visitor pass. It was Craig himself.

CHAPTER XIII

SHIP AND BEACON

CRAIG was the first to speak. Perhaps it was because he had already done his thinking, had decided to accept the one course that appeared to be clear to him.

"I've come to see your father," he said.

He dared not address her otherwise. All that old equality of theirs was gone, so far as Craig was concerned. In a few minutes now he would be the prisoner again. So he was telling himself. He was telling himself that he was the prisoner already.

"My father?" breathed Joan.

She was looking at Craig. But also she was seeing Eddie Yarmouth. On Eddie's face was a look that was stricken, yet not minus hope, for Eddie, emboldened by the need of the moment, was giving her a signal of distress, an appeal to stand by. So was Sanders.

Joan spoke rapidly to these latter.

"Eddie," she said, "you and this gentleman may go and see about having the car pushed into the yard. Get some men to help you." She drew an inspiration from their misery, sought to comfort them. "I'll arrange everything here. Everything will be all right."

She scarcely knew what she was saying. She scarcely heard the sound of her own voice. If Craig had been like a ship driving along a dark coast, she was suddenly become the beacon—shining, doing the right thing, and not questioning beyond this present necessity. The right thing was not to involve others. And everything would be all right.

She saw Craig changed. She saw him free. She saw him very much a man—a young man, tall and strong, roughly dressed. He was dressed as any young engineer might have been dressed when engaged on a rough job, for he had outfitted himself down there in the swamps. It made her head reel and her heart gasp like a fish, the mere thought of taking this man and locking him into a cell.

"You mustn't see my father," she said.

There were tears in her voice, none in her eyes. They were liquid clear.

"I must."

"Why?"

"To give myself up."

"Why must you give yourself up?"

"I've let myself in for it—the only thing I can do."

"You mean because your presence is suspected here."

"By Green and others."

"They've seen you?"

"No."

"Then——"

"But they'll see me if I try to get away."

"Still you can get away."

"Not without their knowing that either you or your father have helped me. Joan—Joan! I am willing. Where is your father?"

"No, no! You mustn't see him." She ran over to the door through which her father had disappeared. She stood there for a moment listening and still trying to get a grip on her thoughts. "Why—why——"

Craig read her thoughts.

"I wanted to show you how strong I was, how clever I was," he began, with a touch of self-contempt. But his mood softened, even toward himself, as Joan left the door and came toward him. "The

real reason was I couldn't forget that you were here."

She made a movement of wilting self-abandonment.

"I know. I understand."

"I wanted to look at this place again, if only from a distance—watch one night under the stars, and feel that I was near you. Heaven forgive me!"

He broke off abruptly. He had said more than he had intended to say. But Joan also spoke impetuously.

"You shan't sacrifice yourself," she said. "I shan't let you."

"Nor will I let you sacrifice yourself or your father."

"I've told my father as much as he wants to know. He suspects that it was Three Sevens he saw out there the other time you came back. That was all right. His conscience could let him let you go again. But it would be different if he saw you here. No, no! He mustn't see you here. He wouldn't be happy if he did. Think of his happiness. Think of mine."

This last was a cry from the heart to which Craig's own heart gave a responsive hail. He was telling himself that this moment was worth all that he had been through. Neither of them could have told how it happened, but the fact was upon them: Joan had surrendered her hands to Craig, Craig was pressing her hands against his breast. They looked at each other. Both of them now were fighting in the same direction—mind fighting through the storm and the darkness toward the ultimate salvation.

"I could bluff Green—frighten him," said Craig.

"I'll hide you until it's dark."

"And get yourself into trouble."

"Do you suppose—oh, what is any trouble of mine compared to yours!"

"Leave it to Eddie," said Craig. "Eddie's the only one, besides yourself, who knows I am here. He'll relieve the gate watch to-night. Flag the midnight train. Jones—Sanders will go on that. There'll be a diversion. I'll take my chances with the posse."

"You mustn't take your chances, none that you don't have to take. I didn't want to tell you—I didn't want to raise false hopes—but I will. You're to be pardoned. I don't know when. But I'm sure of it. There's the debt in the red ledger. You can't pay that off while you're here, and if something happens to you, what good would a pardon do?"

"When I look at you," said Craig, "and when I hear your voice, I feel the strength and the faith to defy the world—live—die! Take heaven or hell by storm!"

But Joan, womanlike, was inspired by this devotion of his to merely practical ends.

"You remember that Aunt Katherine I spoke of?"

"Yes."

"You've got to go to her house."

"And then?"

"Stay there until this storm blows over—until I can get word to you. We live in Fairhaven, not far from there." She read the gathering objections in Craig's eyes. "You've got to do what I ask you," she panted, half in command, half in appeal. "It's for the welfare of all of us."

They heard a distant voice, a distant step. Then the great steam whistle of San Pedro quavered into a mighty blast—like the whistle of any other factory—to indicate that another day of toil and suffering was drawing to a close.

All that evening ex-Warden Green had lurked and watched about this isolated empire where he had once

been the absolute monarch. The more he studied the situation, the less he understood of it. And with his deepening mystification came the sense that some one was trying to make a fool of him—Major Gracie, for example, and again, Three Sevens, for example.

He was there when a gang of trusties came out of the railroad gate of the prison and pushed the box car with the mule in it into the prison yard. What were they doing that for? Was this a subterfuge to get Three Sevens into the prison without his being seen? But, even so, what was the big idea? Why should Three Sevens have wanted to come back to San Pedro at all? And why should Three Sevens have intrusted himself to the keeping of that small man with a squint in his eye?

The ex-warden had seen Sanders or Jones, all right. That was when the trusties had come to push the car into the prison yard. Previously, the ex-warden had seen the keepers come and remove the bound prisoner from the car, and there for a while the ex-warden was excited with the thought that this was Three Sevens himself.

No; it was Sancho Red, as the warden could make out later by the well-known bulk of the famous bandit.

There followed bitter hours when the ex-warden became convinced that the tip was all wrong in the matter of Three Sevens, and that Masters had not come anywhere near San Pedro at all.

Seven or eight friends of his had responded to that call Green had sent out for a posse—ex-keepers mostly from Banner Junction and Clear Rapids, as eager as Green himself was to get revenge on the man who had held them up and imprisoned them and ultimately caused them to lose their places. Green and his posse conferred. It was decided that it would be well to keep an eye on all those who came to the prison and went away in the course of the ensuing night.

The sun flamed down. Camp fires began to twinkle over the San Pedro plain. The original posse had grown—for no special reason, in response to no special appeal or report, except those of the deep-seated instinct that all Americans feel for the chase and the frontier life.

Some sort of a chase was on. Some sort of a vague unrest was in the air. There was a presentiment abroad that something was going to happen, no one knew what.

There were rumors enough.

But only a distant shot in the silence of the desert plain, and a faint babble of voices off in the same direction, rewarded the listeners during the night, as they sat around Green's camp fires.

But the plain around San Pedro, when the night was deep, was like that desert of Egyptian mythology across which the souls of the dead are conducted to the land of ghosts. There were moving shadows about. No one could tell for certain just what had happened except that the ex-warden of San Pedro had fired at a man on a mule and happily missed him, it having turned out that the man was but another volunteer member of the ex-warden's own posse who had ridden over from his own home on a steed like that because he didn't have a horse.

Also, it was known that train No. 93 had been flagged, had taken on a passenger from San Pedro for the West. Not Three Sevens, that. It couldn't have been.

Altogether, the night was destined rather to add to than subtract from the reputation of the late warden of San Pedro.

Green was furious. He was furious with the small, concentrated fury of the large man whose soul is small. He was all by himself as he started to ride away along toward dawn. He swore in his beard.

He recalled ugly souvenirs of his official life in San Pedro. He wished he were still warden there now. He would have done things to relieve his spirit—things that would have made preceding occurrences there pale by comparison.

He was on the trail that led vaguely in the direction of the Fairhaven pike when he heard the honk of an automobile back of him. His horse shied a little. The auto swept past. It was a big touring car that the ex-warden recognized. It was the car of a rich young lawyer of Clear Rapids, a young man named Gary Lee.

Green had reined in his horse. He sat there at the side of the trail for a long time after Lee and his car were gone. He knew that the Lee and the Gracie families belonged to the same social status—a sort of country aristocracy to which he himself had never been able to attain, not even when he had become warden of San Pedro.

What had Lee been doing over at San Pedro, Green wondered—over there sparking the new warden's daughter, perhaps?

"They'll all run after a gal," he meditated in his bitterness.

And little suspected that he was just then echoing a thought that was in the mind of the youth who had passed him so fast in the night in that big touring car.

CHAPTER XIV

AUNT KATHERINE

IT was a trip that had been made in silence. Gary Lee had seen to that. He hadn't told Craig to keep silent, but he had hinted that it would be better not to talk, and Craig had always been a man to take a hint. Still, he would have told Lee everything, had Lee wanted him to, or had even permitted him to. But Lee was a lawyer.

He had come up to Craig in the dark prison yard where neither could have distinctly seen the other's face.

"I've been requested to carry you to a place of safety."

That was about all. Craig had taken his place in the back of the car. The prison gates had swung open. And again the night had become the shoreless gulf of dreams and hopes. Again Craig would have spoken. He would have said: "How wonderful is the night! How strange is the destiny of man! What a pity that there are not more men like Major Gracie in the world! How gladly I'd die for Joan!"

But the handsome, cool, skillful driver of the big touring car was now ignoring him, had as if forgotten him, had spoken no word to him at all except that time he bade Craig hide himself. That was when they passed the ex-warden of San Pedro seated on his horse at the side of the trail.

Dawn came when they reached a wooded crest beyond which lay Fairhaven. And then the big car had trodden as softly as a cat into a sylvan lane.

"I leave you here," said Lee briefly, without giving Craig a glance.

Craig remembered now. Lee had not looked at him once except in the shadowy twilight of the prison yard where he had presented himself. It occurred to Craig that thus would Lee be unable to identify him if ever called upon to do so. Sensible that, and yet there was something about it to make Craig color.

"I am sorry to have occasioned you all this trouble," said Craig.

Lee had a half smile. "I'll introduce you," he said. "Wait here."

There was a cottage at the end of the lane, isolated in a garden of flowers. The late moon had gone, long ago, but the early daybreak was as soft and mysterious as moonlight would have been—a cottage, a garden, woods all around, with even the road and the lane as if private and hidden from the world.

Craig heard Lee knock at the door. There was a wait. Then he heard Lee's voice. Again a long wait. Then Craig saw Lee coming back accompanied by a small old woman, spry enough but bent.

Craig took off his hat. He was ready to be presented. But as he noticed Lee continue speaking without looking in his direction, Craig turned and gazed away. He wished he wasn't there. He remained there until he heard a "Good-by, Miss Middleton," and a snort from the machine. He turned. Lee was intent on turning his machine, and when the machine had obeyed him like a nimble elephant, was gone.

"I'm Miss Gracie's Aunt Katherine," the old lady said. "What has that girl been up to now? Come on in. You can tell me about it while I'm getting you a cup of coffee."

There was a short path leading from the lane to the

cottage door. This path was crowded on both sides by ornamental shrubs—a hundred varieties of them, a riot of them, disordered and lusty, greedy for attention. And among these, Aunt Katherine poked and tweaked while she walked, no coddler, but a natural gardener, breaking off a twig here, a leaf there, pushing back one clamorous spray to give air and light to something else, rough and kindly.

Before Craig had finished his coffee, Aunt Katherine was treating him like that. She had some bitter aloes growing in a little hothouse. She was like those bitter aloes—stiff and rough, but salutary.

She pried into his wounds and she pried into his story. She turned him wrong side out. Many a woman, with age, gets the strength of a man without losing anything of her womanhood—becomes the human being complete and perfect, possessed of all human knowledge worth knowing, and all human experience.

"You're a tough nut," she said. "Joan and Jerry—that's her father—have been sending me human specimens now for years, and I thought I'd about exhausted the lot of them. But you're new. Most of you boys are all alike when you're just out of prison, crazy to square yourselves, but just common and ordinary."

"I'm like that," said Craig.

"I'd die before I admitted it," she said.

"I've got to work."

"You'll work as long as I have you."

"I can't stay here. The posses are probably out again right now."

"I'll guess no posse'll bother you here."

"It may get you into trouble!"

"La, I'm too old to let that worry me. I'm seventy-four and a woman—if you know what that means—which you don't."

Craig slept the clock around. There was a back porch to the cottage, and a part of this had been partitioned off and made into a detached room, two sides of which were lattice, covered thick with morning-glory vines—fragrant, airy, filled with the small noises of the garden and the neighboring woods. This was his room, all his own; and the last time that he had a room of his own—so long ago that it seemed like something remembered from another life—was the airless iron box in the dark subcellar of San Pedro.

In the meantime, it had been as Joan Gracie had predicted that first day that she and Daniel Craig had ever seen each other.

The former population of San Pedro was drifting back again. There had been other posses out scouring the country here and there. Also, there had been raids on cheap lodging houses in big cities here and there. Now and again some railroad detective or other had "swapped shots" with a fugitive. Portraits and descriptions of those who had fled the old prison still adorned the walls of depots and telegraph offices along the railroads, the windows of country stores and village post offices.

Still, as the girl had foretold, all this had been but as a net for the taking of the smaller fish. The big ones, like the two that Craig had himself thus far taken, had broken through.

Craig, cutting firewood out in the thick forest that extended for miles in almost every direction from his place of refuge, sat on the barrow he had loaded and looked at the little red book. Not even here would he know peace until that debt was paid. He read the names, like the items of an account that had been written against his own name: Trick O'Ray, safe blower and robber; Count Wolf, international thief and swindler; Ben Jarvis, highwayman; Taylor

Leamy, promoter of fake mining companies; Harry Gosse, otherwise "Harry, the Goose"——

The signature of Joan Gracie looked up at him, as she had written it, linked with his own. He kissed the place where her hand had rested. Could he keep on dawdling like this, waiting? Waiting for what!

It was as if some similar spell had come over the woods, as well. There, for the time being, no bird chirped nor leaf stirred in the breeze, no squirrel ran, nor even a locust sang.

Then, through this silence, came a slight vibration of sound that brought a chill with it—as the whir of a rattlesnake does, however faint and far away. This was no rattlesnake, although there were a few in the open, sandy places. But, all the same, the sound was one that caused Craig to clasp the red book to his breast, caused him to hold his breath, with open mouth, as he listened.

There was something in that sound that had recalled the prison—why, how, he could not tell.

He knew that the chase had never stopped, never would stop so long as he or any one else who had escaped from San Pedro should be on earth and still unaccounted for. He knew that much about the law, both man-made and natural, that it never forgets.

But he hadn't expected it so soon. Then he had left the barrow behind him, was running through the woods in the direction of the cottage. He went with all the speed he could manage—while making no noise.

He came out of the woods at the back of the garden. He vaulted the fence, sped up the back path and around the side of the house with the silent certainty of a shadow. How grateful he was now that Aunt Katherine had kept him here, and his strength was with him again!

Just before he turned the corner of the house that would bring him in view of whoever it was out there in front, talking to Aunt Katherine, he paused once more, drew a deep breath.

Yes, he had recognized that voice. He had heard it once, heard it in the dark. It was the voice, sneering and cruel, that he had heard from dark cell No. 4, the voice of him who had boasted that he was a "killer." And the name of this creature was in the little red book, put there in the blessed handwriting of Joan Gracie.

"Well, ain't you goin' to give me no money?" This from the killer.

"No. I've fed you, now be on your way."

Craig turned the corner. There was Aunt Katherine, with a grim expression on her face, plucking off a dead leaf here, tucking a branch up there, rough and nervous, but all as usual.

Beyond her was the former occupant of No. 4, and there was joy in his face. It was a face that was pasty and concave. The joy was a greed. It was a fearful thing to see, or to guess the presence of—as if there had been another face, or another something, back of a sheet, showing itself only through those glittering eyes.

Craig took a step forward—a step as stiff and ponderous and yet as silent as the step of a mastiff stalking a cat. And, curiously enough, he was aware at once that Aunt Katherine knew he was there—that she had seen his shadow—while the man from No. 4 could see nothing, for the moment, but this fascinating, hypnotizing victim.

An old woman! All alone! Rich, most likely! Not even a neighbor within a quarter of a mile!

Then pasty face looked up.

"Hello, Harry," said Craig softly. He repeated it, what was written in the little red book, and to him-

self it sounded as if Joan were there repeating it for him, word for word, as she had written it: "'Harry Gosse—Harry the Goose—married a girl and murdered her.'"

The thing looking through the sheet, the dirty drab sheet, of Harry's face flickered and changed.

"Why, Tommy," he began.

Then Harry had dropped his hand into the side pocket of his coat. He didn't stop or hesitate or try to pull his hand out again. He fired through the cloth.

CHAPTER XV

QUARRY

THERE was a shout from the road. And the shout spoiled any intention Harry, the Goose, may have had for a second shot. Yet he knew that his first and only shot had gone wide of the mark. With that peculiar, microscopic interest that all men have for little things in the midst of big events, Harry had seen a blood-red rose, well off to one side of Craig, drop as if the stem of it had been snipped by invisible shears, and knew that it was there his bullet had passed.

Besides, Craig had him—had seized his two wrists, the one that was in his pocket and the other in the air, and was squeezing them fit to pulverize the bones.

It would have been all over with Harry, the Goose—was, in fact, all over with him, anyway—if it hadn't been for that shout in the road. For both he and Craig had twisted so that they could look in that direction. And, for a static moment, so they remained—a picture of two brothers embracing each other, ready to kiss.

A group of men, also momentarily static, were out there at the head of the lane.

Harry, the Goose, let out a whimper.

"They were follerin' me!"

It was true, as Craig himself divined. Harry, the Goose, was no top-liner, like Count Wolf, or even Trick O'Ray, to fool the sleuths for very long, not even the country sleuths. Over beyond the woods,

somewhere, he had held up a country school-teacher —a girl—and robbed her of fifty cents besides almost frightening her to death. Then a farmer who came up had got busy on the telephone.

There they were now, a dozen farmers, some of them mounted—some armed with pitchforks, most of them armed with guns.

These, though, Craig saw as more details of the landscape. There was a central figure to the landscape, and him alone could Craig distinctly see. It was his former master, big and bearded—ex-tyrant of San Pedro, ousted, disgraced, smarting with the pain of it all, lustful of revenge: Warden Green!

At sight of him, Craig felt the strength go out of his arms. His heart stood still. What if these men should arrest him here, find out that he had been working for Aunt Katherine, near relative of the new warden of San Pedro.

What of her? What of Joan Gracie and her father? What of Gary Lee, the aristocrat, who had brought him here?

He was willing to take the chance of the posse out there capturing Harry Gosse.

He whirled and stooped. He ran crouchingly, to keep the cover as much as possible of these friendly flowers he had come to love. He rounded the house, back the way he had come, through the back garden, over the back fence, into the woods.

He wasn't frightened on his own account. Aunt Katherine's worries were all that worried him. These woods he knew. No Indian captive, with a hostile tribe at his back, could have gained these woods with a greater assurance of escape.

A sinking in his heart told him that this was so even when a complex bellow told him that he had been discovered again, that the crowd was starting in pursuit. That was Warden Green's voice booming

through the others as a horn booms through the lighter instruments of an orchestra.

"Git'm, boys! The first one! Three Sevens himself! Thousand dollars' reward!"

"I'm running," said Craig, "with a price on my head."

It seemed strange that this should be so, yet another major link in his chain of great events. Stranger yet it seemed to him that he wasn't frightened.

He wasn't frightened until, as he was about to slacken his pace in a mossy little dell where the water dripped all about and queer little bell-like flowers grew, thick and waxy white. Here where he had dreamed so often, since his second escape from San Pedro, he heard a thudding footfall back of him, a rending of brush, a gasp of exhausted lungs.

Some one had almost overtaken him. And it was then that it occurred to him how easy it would be for this other to shoot him in the back. This other was armed. He was not. He dared not stop. He dared not turn. The panting pursued him. Each gasping breath might mean that the runner would stop running, in despair, and begin to shoot.

Back there where the race began, a number of the men, Warden Green among them, had paused for a moment to inquire of Miss Middleton if she had seen any other than these two about.

She said yes. She said they knew her—how she always gave work and a mouthful to eat to every one who came along, and how one of these boys had been lingering around here for quite a while, and that she had been expecting him back at any minute. She rambled on, until they lost patience with her, and also a fraction of invaluable time—which is always enough to win or lose a race.

So they murmured among themselves and scattered at top speed, and Aunt Katherine picked up the

blood-red rose which, as one might say, had been shed in her honor. A hard old woman, and as much a man as a woman in some respects, but Aunt Katherine was all woman, right at that particular moment, with the tears dropping down her wrinkled cheeks.

"God save you, Danny!" she whispered, under her breath—she who had always treated this ex-convict, who had been thrust upon her, with a certain wholesome bitterness.

Craig ran. He plunged downhill. He jumped into gullies. There was no shaking off the pursuer who was at his heels. The worst of it was, he was no longer free to go where he willed on another account.

That gang of guns and pitchforks who had accompanied the ex-warden of San Pedro were themselves woodsmen to some extent familiar with the lay of the land. They were spreading out, as they would have done in an old-fashioned fox drive.

Twice, now, Craig had all but run into one of them, had swerved just in time, brought fresh danger to his trail. And, sooner or later, the pack would begin to close in. Even the stag has to give up at last in a chase like this. And he himself was almost winded.

He determined on a last, desperate play. He knew where there was a dry watercourse full of small boulders. He made for this, while he dragged those footfalls back of him like a curse. He toppled over the bank of the watercourse there where he could have at least some cover. He picked up a boulder in each hand.

His lungs were laboring. So was his heart. But he had strength and the will for almost anything rather than surrender.

He had just turned, just drawn back his right hand with the stone in it, when the bushes swerved,

and a man stumbled through. It was Harry, the Goose!

It was Harry who had followed him like that through the woods, Harry who had borne up during the long chase. It was fear that had given him the strength, even as it had added to the strength of Craig. But the race had been unequal. It was always easier to follow than to lead.

But, if it had been unequal in this respect, it was balanced in another. Craig still had strength. Harry had none. He stumbled to his knees. He went over on his side. He lay there like a wounded man, gasping, his mouth wide open, unable to move, his ugly face set to the lines of exhaustion.

Craig crawled out of his waterway. He took Harry's pistol from him. Then he sat at Harry's side, and pumped the air into his own lungs.

At the same time he listened. This double trail that he and Harry had made would be easy enough to follow, but now he saw that he had an advantage, after all. The pursuers knew that at least one of them was armed, must have believed them both to be armed. There could be no blind plunging through the woods for them. They would have to go slow, examine each tree and bush.

There is something about a habit of environment in the matter of thought. Since his second escape from prison, these woods had become a thinking place for Craig—a sort of temple, for resolutions, hopes, and prayers. And the habit declared itself now, strange as it may seem—with a murderous pack warm on his trail, and an enemy here at his side who but a few minutes ago had made a cowardly attempt on his life.

"They've got us," gasped Harry.

"Shut up," said Craig.

"Gimme a drink!" panted Harry.

"I'll give you water in a minute," whispered Craig fiercely.

"Give me water!"

"Yes!"

"You got nerve!"

Harry was for sitting up. He must have been muddled on the circumstances—must have thought that Craig was as frightened as he was, that the chase had made them brothers again. Wrong. Craig flattened him with a push of his open hand.

"Stay there and keep quiet," said Craig.

Harry, the Goose, sat up.

"I'm going," he announced, in a snarling whisper.

"Stay where you are. I'll tell you what you're to do and what you're not to do."

"What are you talking about?"

"I don't know whether to tie you up——"

"You tie me up!"

"—and leave you for the posse, or try to take you back myself."

"Where?"

"San Pedro."

There for a moment terror and rage were battling for possession of Harry's drab face.

It was clear that he thought he had to do with a maniac, and a maniac who was dangerous. Fear won. His mouth sagged open. It dribbled out black blasphemy like the drooling of a wounded puff adder.

"If I leave you," said Craig, "you might get lynched."

"You're crazy."

Harry twitched his eyes this way and that.

"They've got a new warden there," said Craig, "who's going to give every one a square deal—even you."

"You dirty snake!"

And Harry had his hand again in his pocket. He

had been so overcome that it wasn't until then that he learned his pistol was gone. He saw it in Craig's hand, pointed at him.

"Don't get noisy," said Craig. "Say what you want to"—he himself was using the almost silent lip speech that he had learned in San Pedro—"but say it like this."

Harry tried to argue.

"They'll pinch you, too."

"Maybe!"

"And give you life for what you done. I had no share in it."

"Maybe!"

"You're after the reward."

"That's also why I'm taking you back myself."

"Sellin' me!"

"Giving you away," smiled Craig. "If I left you to these farmers, the county or the State would be that much poorer, so I will not do it."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm trying to pay back to society what I owe."

This was beyond Harry, the Goose. He sought to mollify his captor, the while his eyes shifted.

"For Heaven's sake, Tommy! Me and you ought to be friends."

"We are! San Pedro's going to be a place to do you good."

"And you, you louse!"

"I'll go back, too—when I've finished."

"But, Tommy!"

"Sh! Some one's coming. Listen, Goose. Would you rather take a chance with me, or an old-fashioned lynching bee? You know the kind—rope—limb—shots—maybe a fire."

Harry, the Goose, broke down and began to blubber.

"I can't help it," he said. "Can't you have pity on me poor old mother?"

CHAPTER XVI

MERE RUMORS

A PART, at least, of what Craig had seen with the eye of his mind was right with regard to Joan Gracie. Intuitional, passionate, with both the passion native to youth and a nature made that way; but loyal! Loyalty was the crown of her character, topping off the complex all of it as did the yellow hair on top of her complex, strong, and likewise beautiful physical presence.

This was part of what had been in Major Gracie's brain that afternoon he had sat out there with Daniel Craig—one-time Thomas Masters, convict No. 3777—at the side of him and yet raised no hand to capture him. The major himself was loyal. But with him also—as it must have been with his daughter—this loyalty had not been so simple as he could have demanded.

Loyalty to the State! Loyalty to this man—this mere boy who had thus far so badly bungled his life!

The major hadn't forgotten that stark terror that had been in his heart the day that the delayed special was rushing him to San Pedro. What had happened to Joan? And what might not have happened to her if it hadn't been for this same Daniel Craig.

He understood Joan's feelings. It hadn't been necessary for her to give him much of a report on what she herself had done—not at first. They had learned to take each other for granted.

The fuller report had come that night, late, when

she and her father were alone, and when she knew, and he knew, that Daniel Craig was miles away on the borrowed horse. It was only then that she brought out Craig's photograph—"Thomas Masters, manslaughter, No. 3777"—and told her father the reasons that had inspired her in helping him to his precarious liberty.

The major heard her through.

A tall and thoughtful man was the major, with a curved and heavy, but short, gray mustache, a tuft of gray hair under his lower lip, short-clipped gray hair, tossed back near one temple in what used to be called a "cowlick."

"You did this on your own responsibility?" said the major.

"Yes, sir," said Joan, standing very straight in front of him, as she always did when talking business.

"You committed a crime."

"It was a crime that was—right."

The major himself had written a work on "Crime and Moral Turpitude." But he did not smile.

"Why didn't you trust me with this before?"

"You were involved. Your hands were tied by your oath of office."

"I might have won him a pardon for saving you."

"And had the whole world saying that you had staged the thing to disgrace your predecessor!"

The major saw the point. He never did have a head for politics. Joan did. Few women that have not. But the major also saw something else, dimly, a little more clearly, then more clearly yet. It was as if, at the time, he had known there would come a day when he should want to recall the picture. He was recalling it now:

A dingy courtroom where a boy was on trial for his life; a boy who was upstanding, with a fine, strong

profile, a melancholy but soldierly gray eye; a boy who would speak no word in his own behalf, or tell what his name was, or from whence he came. Some one else had said that his name was Masters—Thomas Masters. Some one else had said that he had been found in the dark near where the boss of the camp was shot down; that from the place where he was there had come the flash of the shot; that at his side was the revolver with one cartridge empty, of a caliber that fitted the bullet.

The prosecutor had begged for a verdict of first-degree murder. The lawyer appointed for the defense had mumbled a perfunctory address on the lack of motive and the presence of a reasonable doubt. The jury had brought in a verdict of manslaughter. And his honor the judge:

"Thomas Masters, what have you to say why judgment of the court should not be pronounced upon you according to law?"

Still no word; no word at all from the boy through all of this.

The judge had harped on this silence in his discourse preceding the sentence. He was one of those judges who are easily hurt and savage in reprisal. "I shall therefore sentence you to twenty years in State's prison."

Not the palatial penitentiary, nor the reformatory, but State's prison, San Pedro! The major himself had groaned a bit in his heart, although he was no sentimentalist at all, where lawbreakers were concerned.

"When he told me that he was innocent, I believed him," said Joan.

"I shouldn't be surprised," said the major, out of his thoughtfulness. "Although any man in the prison would have said the same thing, though not once in a thousand times would it be the truth."

"It was true this time. It must be true."

The major's mind slipped from his daughter's words to what he had heard from No. 8888—that little old-timer named Yarmouth. He also had made a statement like this one almost word for word: " 'Tis the truth this time, sir. It must be true."

Perhaps Eddie, the Yegg, also was intuitional. Eddie, almost as the sole remaining prisoner outside the hospital at the time that the new warden of San Pedro arrived, had reported in full all that had taken place—his own oath, down there in the punishment block, an oath to obey orders as given by Three Sevens, to kill no man, and to make no effort to escape on his own account. Eddie recounted all of this with touches of pride and imagination.

For, in the course of his professional career, Eddie had been through a number of prison revolts and riots, and this had been different from all of them, somehow mysterious and beautiful.

Said Eddie: " 'Twas the thought back of it, sir, that ought to've brought him the luck."

Perhaps Major Gracie was of the same opinion.

Not so, Gary Lee. For, a couple of days after he had driven the strange man away from San Pedro in his big car by night and brought him to the refuge of Aunt Katherine's, Lee had driven again to San Pedro and there had called on Joan and her father—particularly on Joan.

"Bad business, Joan," he said, when he and the girl were alone.

"What?"

"Your having anything to do with getting this man away from prison. I wish that you and your father had decided to remain in Fairhaven. Confound it! When I think of you and him being mixed up with a lot of felons!"

"Felons are people, Gary," she answered. "I dread

them, and hate what they represent as much as you do. Still, you can't generalize."

She may have colored slightly. Her eyes failed to meet his.

"You know," said Lee, "that there is nothing under heaven that I wouldn't do on your account, Joan. No risk that you could ask me to take would be too great."

"I'm grateful to you, Gary," said Joan.

"I'm not referring, therefore, to anything that might have happened to me if I'd been caught helping that convict to escape. It's the fact that you'd be willing to run such a risk, submit others to the risk—your father, your Aunt Katherine. No convict is worth it—not all the felons in the State."

"I thought you said you were interested in reform."

"I am."

"This was humanitarian."

"That's the danger of this sort of stuff," said Lee. "You let your sympathies run away with you."

"He was ready to sacrifice himself on our account—give up his own chances of escape."

"Noble, I'll admit."

"And undo the wrong he had committed. He didn't intend to let the bad ones out, and he's promised to bring them back."

Lee was torn between scorn and pity, anger and desire.

"I did what you wanted me to," he said. "I even went so far as not to look at him when it was getting light. I couldn't tell him now from Adam. I wouldn't know him if I met him in the street. I did all this on your account when my every instinct was to arrest him myself, or, at least, so fix his face in my mind that I could identify him and do my part as a

citizen and an officer of the court—help put him back where he belongs."

"I'm sorry—sorry!" said Joan.

"Then, marry me," said Lee.

Her eyes finally met his.

"You said you wouldn't ask me again unless——"

"You gave me some sign," said Lee, with concentrated feeling. "Wasn't this thing sign enough? Your honor and mine are at stake. They'll arrest this cur. He'll blab—tell what he knows—try to blackmail us both."

She met him squarely.

"I don't believe it."

"Joan, I'm a lawyer. I know these vermin."

"Don't! Don't!" she said. "It isn't fair. It isn't just."

"Marry me," he whispered, with a touch of desperation.

She looked at him in silence. Almost in silence he left her.

There was a danger in this situation which neither Gary Lee nor Joan Gracie had mentioned, but which both had recognized in their several ways. They had not mentioned it, although, in many respects, that same degree of almost brutal frankness existed between them as often exists between brother and sister. Like brother and sister, they were of the same caste, had known each other intimately since childhood—had squabbled, played, studied together, gone to the same parties.

That was in Clear Rapids, the principal city of the State, where Joan's mother herself had passed her girlhood. Then, when Mrs. Gracie died, Major Gracie had returned to the home of his own youth, Fairhaven, near which place Aunt Katherine Middleton had her home.

The danger was this:

Gary Lee must have things his own way. He had always been like that. Generous, courtly, as long as his own will wasn't interfered with, he could be as ruthless as a tiger when things went wrong.

A little strain of madness, perhaps, such as all of us are reported to possess—and, if the truth were known, the only thing that makes life worth living, perhaps. It's like the yeast, bad in itself, a fungus, a ferment, that yet makes bread palatable; or the strain of madness that makes the poet, or the general, or the savant who passes a lifetime looking at bugs and worms.

When Lee read in the Clear Rapids *Sentinel,* incidental to the other news that was still coming out of San Pedro, that Miss Joan Gracie had returned to her home in Fairhaven, he felt a familiar surge of heat in the region of his heart. It was a feeling he had known ever since he could remember—when he was a mere infant, and the nurse wouldn't give him a toy, when he was a cub, and they wouldn't let him eat another piece of cake, when he was an adolescent and some girl or other, Joan as often as not, showed preference for a rival.

There entered Lee's mind a dark thought that this was a case of rivalry now, that there actually was a rivalry between himself—himself, Gary Lee!—and this felon.

But he conquered the thought, to some extent. Also, to some extent he conquered that feeling of heat in the region of his heart. He was aware of his weakness. As he grew older he had learned, as men must, each year a little more self-control.

Yet there was no denying it. There was Joan in Fairhaven. Five miles, not more, from Fairhaven was the cottage to which he himself had carried that man in the dark of the night. His hand trembled a little as he picked up the telephone from his office

desk. He ordered his car. His stenographer looked at him with a touch of concern.

"You're to attend a directors' meeting at two thirty."

"I can't be there. Tell 'em so."

"You were to see Mr. Strouthers at——"

"Telephone him not to come."

"Will you sign your letters?"

"Hold them," said Lee. "I'm called to Fairhaven. Put everything off until to-morrow."

He descended to the street. The garage was near by. There was never any delay when he ordered his car. The car rolled up to meet him at the curb. He changed his hat for a cap, drew on a pair of driving gloves, dismissed the chauffeur. It always helped him a lot, in a mood like this, to drive as few chauffeurs would or could have driven.

He was standing there with his hand on the door of the car, when a newspaper man whom Lee knew well happened along.

"Hello, Gary," said the journalist. "Big news."

"Hello, Jack," and Gary, indifferent, entered the car.

"They've got him," said the newspaper man.

"Who?"

"Three Sevens, the fellow——"

"They've what?"

"Just got the tip at the office. They caught the fellow who put over the big play at San Pedro."

"Are you sure?"

"We're never sure till we know, but we got the tip from one of our own men. Phoned over from Fairhaven——"

Lee had thrown in the clutch, was on his way.

Major Gracie, at San Pedro, had got word also almost as soon as any one that there were matters

of interest to him under way over there in the direction of his home. First that a farmer had recognized one of the escaped convicts by the name of Gosse. Three hundred dollars' reward, in this case, and the informant wanted to register his claim for all that was coming to him. Then another informant telephoned. Next came a claim by telegram. After that, the *Sentinel* sent word that it was not Gosse who had been seen, but Masters, the ringleader of the big escape.

The major had sent word to his daughter to their home in Fairhaven. It wasn't a measure of discipline, exactly, but he felt sure that she had been getting a trifle too much of this prison atmosphere lately. She was too earnest, too devoted to her work as his secretary and mentor.

There crinkled into his thought a crooked little flash of light—like remote lightning, faint and devoid of thunder as yet, but possibly prophetic of storm.

Did Joan have anything to do with this? He also ordered his car, was off for Fairhaven.

Joan Gracie herself also had heard the news. It had been a day of news.

First of all, her aunt had telephoned her, as she did daily. Aunt Katherine was the volunteer probation officer of this convict she had harbored at Joan's request. She understood Joan almost better than any one did. Joan had acted on impulse. Joan had been sure that her impulse was right. But, since then, the girl had begun to worry.

"La, he's all right. I'll ship him off, as soon's you say—*if* he'll wait that long."

Every day since Joan's return to Fairhaven Aunt Katherine had telephoned things like that, except when Aunt Katherine was coming to town, as she did two or three times a week, in the suburban bus. It was the old lady who was furnishing the strength required by the situation now, and there was also a

grim humor in the situation that had made its appeal to Aunt Katherine's bitter but wholesome nature.

So far as she knew she had never harmed a human being in the course of her long life, yet now she had become a lawbreaker by harboring an escaped convict. The whole country was interested in the discovery of a famous bad man. She alone was seeing him daily and finding him gentle and good. There was a thousand dollars' reward out for his arrest. She had him.

But she wouldn't let Joan come to her house, not while Craig was there. Ah, no! People talk. She herself was safe from scandal. Anyway, she was too old to mind any more. But not so, where a young girl was concerned, Joan above all.

Then, at last, this day, after those earlier rumors of a bandit chase through the woods north of town, there came a call from Aunt Katherine for Joan to come out. No explanation—everything all right.

Joan met a friend at the gate, daughter of some county official or other, and hence in touch with the courthouse.

"Have you heard!" she cried. "They say they've caught that famous bandit—Masters——"

"Where?"

"Out near your Aunt Katherine's."

CHAPTER XVII

GATHERING STORM

MEANTIME that hunt through the woods for that king of big-game animals, man himself!

The rumors that had thus far spread out as far as Clear Rapids and San Pedro, and farther yet, as a matter of fact, for this developing event in the neighborhood of Fairhaven was the news of the day for the country at large, were like lions of magnetic attraction, an attraction that ran straight to the innermost fibers of half the men who heard the reports, calling them to drop other things, awakening inside of them old atavisms of the chase and war. A man hunt was on. It was free for every one. Grab a pitchfork or a gun.

That nucleus of a mob, with the ex-warden of San Pedro at its head, was growing steadily.

A man in a Norman runabout saw a farmer with a gun on the highway and asked him what was going on. The farmer told him. The Norman became the chariot of a herald.

The driver of the rural bus carried the news into Fairhaven, and there the word spread like a grass fire.

"Got him cornered!"

"Who?"

"Masters, of San Pedro."

"Where?"

"Right outside of town—Dingledine Woods!"

There had already been a report that one of the escaped convicts of San Pedro had been seen—Harry,

the Goose—but this earlier report merely went to strengthen the later one. Harry, the Goose, was forgotten. No one had ever heard of him, anyway. Masters was the man—the Napoleon of the Underworld!

"They got him cornered!"

"Ain't got him yet. Bet he puts up a battle!"

There was a drift out of town by all who could go—the call of excitement, the promptings of greed; but, most of all, the old lust of the chase, the man hunt.

As a thousand little events go into the fabrication of the big event, so the thousand little rumors swell the big rumor. It was that way now. Two men shot! Got him in a barn—goin' to set fire to it! Murdered an old woman!

Loafers, day workers, high-school boys, farmers, politicians, ex-deputy sheriffs; all the hands of a suburban paper mill, the working force of a stone quarry; all the spectators and some of the players from an amateur baseball game.

Here and there some one fired a gun—with what intent only himself might know—just nervousness, most likely, but successful always in starting a new swirl of movement, a new drift, a fresh batch of rumors. The chase was at its height when it was added to by the strangers and notables from other villages and towns.

Among these were Gary Lee, from Clear Rapids, and Major Gracie, from San Pedro.

Finally they met at the Gracie home, where Joan and her Aunt Katherine had preceded them. Both Joan and Aunt Katherine had decided it would be better for them to spend the night together at the Gracie home in town. The woods, particularly in the neighborhood of the Middleton cottage, were swarm-

ing by this time. There was a crowd in the usually empty lane and in the little-frequented road.

Here the Napoleon of the Underworld had been seen. No one had the straight of it. They quested for information among themselves, each telling the other as first-hand information what each had just heard from somebody else.

There was a tense excitement even in the town itself, among those whom duty or disinclination had kept from joining the chase.

What had happened out there? What was happening now? What was going to happen?

More and more an ugly phrase was heard. Folks passed it on, half in jest, certainly without stopping to think, in most instances, what the words implied. But the phrase itself was fire, and the town was becoming a powder mill. The phrase was this:

"He ought to be lynched!"

Joan, with a white face and shimmering eyes, completed the confession that hitherto she had made only in part. She told her father that not only had she originally recommended that convict No. 3777 cross the valley on the farmer's borrowed horse—which she herself had later returned, but, this time, had had Gary Lee carry the fugitive on to Aunt Katherine's, there to remain until he had recovered his strength, and people were no longer so bent on capturing him.

"If this story comes out——" said Major Gracie, after a terrifying silence.

"That is what I said," Gary Lee remarked.

They were in the Gracie parlor at the time. The windows were open, the curtains stirring slowly in the breeze. The breeze was scented with clipped lawns and newly sprinkled streets, for the house stood far out in a residential section of the town that was almost suburban. And it was very quiet. There were none

of the noises associated with towns at all, except the occasional grind of a passing auto, the hammers and voices of carpenters at work on a house, the clang and clank of the railroad yards a quarter of a mile away.

But gradually there overcame these sounds a sort of surging murmur—something that they seemed to have noticed for quite a while before they paid attention to it.

"What is that sound?"

"Yes, I've been hearing it for some time."

"It sounds like cheering."

"There it is again."

They looked into each other's eyes. They knew all about that man hunt that had called its hundreds into the woods to the north of the town.

Gary turned to Joan.

"It sounds to me," said he, "as if they had caught that friends of ours, sure enough."

He saw the whiteness and the tensity of her face.

"Joan!" he whispered.

She disregarded him. She faced her father.

"What are you going to do?"

"Get to the sheriff as soon as I can—see that there's no lynching."

"I'll go with you, sir," said Lee.

"Stay with the ladies," said the major, giving orders. "And you, young lady"—he turned to Joan—"I'll ask to remain in quarters."

"Please!" she cried.

"What!"

The major didn't intend to, but he himself went a little white. For the first time within his memory, Joan had questioned an order. The orders, to be sure, had been few and wise.

"I tell you, this poor creature saved my life."

"And he'll make the most of it," muttered Lee.

But Joan had thrown her arms about her father's neck. He looked across the top of her head at his sister-in-law.

"You're in charge of your Aunt Katherine," he said.

He drew himself up. So did the others. There was no mistaking that distant mob music. The man hunters were ready for the kill.

Those sounds of a growing mob had been frequent enough even before Craig and Craig's prisoner, Harry, the Goose, had left the edge of their dry watercourse. The woods were being overrun.

Craig had only one thought, and that was to keep the chase going until night. He saw that, even before night, he and Harry would have a good chance to put the region behind them. There were only a few in the crowd who could have recognized either him or Harry, anyway, but he knew the instinct of the small-town crowd and the country crowd for strangers.

He and Harry were strangers. That was enough. They would have to keep out of sight until the sun went down, or, if seen, stave off suspicion as best they could until they were out of sight again. Violence would do no good. In most of the crises that Craig could think of, he knew that the revolver he had taken from Harry would be worse than useless.

One shot against a hundred. He would, indeed, rather spend it on himself than on some innocent farmhand doing his best, according to his own lights, to serve his country by running down an escaped convict to earth.

He found a mossy hollow where there was water. He let Harry drink. But he himself didn't drink. In addition to his other worries he had Harry to watch. He put no faith in Harry—no faith of any kind. Harry was a coward. Harry was cruel. It

would be just like him to think that he was forwarding his own welfare by killing Craig—if he got the chance.

They rested in a cedar copse until they heard a stealthy tread. They could see an old party with chin whiskers moving through the beech trees a little lower down. He carried a squirrel rifle. He might have been hunting squirrels—he was so soft-footed, and he was looking down, as a squirrel hunter might, for sign. Then sign of some sort he must have found. He gave a slight start. His goatee snapped down, then up. He turned and beckoned.

It was not until then that they saw that he was followed by two other men. One of these was a mere overgrown boy, armed with an old horse pistol of a type used long before the Civil War. But the other hunter looked businesslike, a dark and stocky-bearded man with a shotgun over his shoulder. These two hurried up. They looked at the sign the old man had found.

"Hisn," said the old man.

"Are you sure?"

"Sure's shootin'. Them's his shoes. I studied 'em right whar the schoolmarm pointed 'em out to me."

The overgrown boy with the horse pistol turned and stared at the cedars so intently that Craig felt his own heart sicken a little. Harry had been ready to break and run, but he had gripped him.

The two of them began to edge back together.

"They're close," the old trailer said.

The dark man with the shotgun threw his weapon forward.

Harry, the Goose, turned a white and sweaty face to Craig. His lips moved with the all-but-silent speech of his prison days.

"Shoot! Shoot the stiffs—why don't you?"

"Steady," said Craig, also silently. "There's some one over there back of us."

Suddenly, off not more than a hundred yards or so beyond the place where the squirrel hunter and his friends had found the thing they were looking for, a scream went up—a scream that was savage and exultant.

"Ki-yi! Here he is, fellers."

There was an interval when even the woods seemed to listen, then a crash of branches, a shot.

"Stop! Stop!"

The squirrel hunter let out a whinny.

"Gosh dang! Somebuddy's got him first!"

But the dark-faced man with the shotgun spoke never a word. He jerked around in the direction of the noise. He was ready to fire. He trotted off, and this time the others were following him—the old man with the squirrel rifle, the boy with the horse pistol, each cocking his weapon as he ran.

"Now is the time," Harry chattered.

Now was the time, if ever! There where the original outbreak had occurred there was a mixture of cries and laughter, whoops, whistles. Some of the hunters had been in pairs, some in groups. It must have been that all of these had arranged signals among themselves, or had signals that they knew their friends would understand. Suddenly, the chase was over. Those in at the blood were calling the other human hounds.

It didn't matter much now to Craig whether he was seen, so long as it would be by no one likely to recognize him—like ex-Warden Green, for example. Where was Green? But Craig had no fear of such pictures of himself as might have been sent abroad. When these were taken, he was smooth shaven. Now he had a fuzzy, nascent beard—not much of a beard. Still, not for six weeks had his face known a razor.

And when those pictures of his were taken, moreover, he was new to prison, ignorant of dark cells, ignorant of suffering, almost—suffering as he had come to know it.

But, every now and then, out of those cries and other noises that came from over there among the trees, he heard the voice of some one who pleaded, who reasoned, who argued, who denied.

"Come with me," he said to Harry, "and, listen! What I said a while ago still holds. Try a break and I'll maim you."

"Where are you going?"

"To see who it is they've caught. Shut up! Go on!"

But hardly had they come to the edge of the cedars before the crowd was breaking through the brush beyond the beeches. In the midst of them they saw the man who had been caught by mistake.

Sick, haggard, frightened, unshaven, in rags—it made Harry laugh to see him, made Craig want to weep, especially when he remembered the music this man had made. It was Zabrewski, the organ player.

Then, to Craig, it seemed as if this storm that had been gathering for so long flashed into lightning and thunder in his brain. He couldn't see Zabrewski frightened, mistreated like that. Zabrewski was a genius, albeit a genius gone wrong.

Craig had flung Harry, the Goose, before him. He let out a cry that made even the crowd go silent, stand, and stare. It was a snarl like a lion's:

"Har!"

CHAPTER XVIII

TOWARD SUNDOWN

THERE were still those who pawed at Zabrewski, poked at him with gun barrels and sticks. There was no chance of Zabrewski's getting away. But that sudden cry of Craig's—so loud, so determined, so filled with something just a trifle more than human—had brought most of the crowd to facing in his direction.

Craig spoke up:

"*He* isn't the man we're after."

There was a mixture of voices—surprise and dissent, questions, scoffings. But to the hungry attention of Craig's inner self there came no sign that he himself was suspected.

"*Here's* the man," said Craig. And he had his hand on Harry's shoulder, shoving him forward. Harry let out a yelp, blasphemous, of rage and terror. He tried to turn, tried to beat Craig with his fists. But Craig had a grip on Harry's collar with his right hand. With his left, he jerked Harry's arm back and up. Harry spat and gasped venom like a snared bobcat.

"Then, who's *this* feller?" the captor of Zabrewski demanded.

"A crazy organist."

There was a laugh at that.

"What was *he* hidin' fer?"

Craig shoved the human bobcat to the front. There was no profit in answering too many questions.

"*Here's* the man!"

He saw the dark-faced man with the shotgun, the old party with the squirrel rifle, the youth with the horse pistol. They were a solid group in the unorganized mob. Craig addressed them:

"Gentlemen, the reward is yours——"

"You hear what he says?" whinnied the goatee. And there was a look of swift eagerness and pride on the part of the other two trailers.

Craig spoke to the crowd.

"This gentleman here"—referring to goatee—"will tell you the kind of footprint our man makes."

"A heel off one shoe!" whinnied the old party.

"Right! Right!" yelled those who jostled close to see, and the yell flamed up into something like a cheer.

In the midst of all this, Harry, the Goose, had about as much chance to plead his case as a rat among terriers. But the Zabrewski group was sullen. Some one over in that direction called: "We ought to string 'em both up!"

"None of that!" shouted Craig. "Gentlemen," and he addressed the squirrel hunter and his companions as he might have addressed partners and old friends, "I'll ask you to go with me. He's your prisoner."

Harry, the Goose, babbled that this was an atrocious and sanguinary frame-up—words to this effect. Here, holding him, bluffing them, was Three Sevens—Thomas Masters—the man who was to blame for all this—the eternally condemned child of evil parentage the whole world was looking for.

Craig twisted Harry and looked into his face. No one but Harry, and possibly Zabrewski, knew what Craig said. But Harry got the message all right, from Craig's scarcely moving lips:

"Shut up, or I let them lynch you!"

Harry stuttered into silence.

"I'm saving your life," said Craig silently.

Whereupon Harry hysterically sobbed: "I never done nothin' to you. Save my life! Save my life!"

"There's a reward for that man, too," and this time Craig spoke with directness to Zabrewski's captor. "You'll help us—get our men to town."

Other hunters were coming on the run.

"We got 'em! We got 'em!"

But there was nothing very definite. There was nothing definite at all in Craig's own mind. What lay ahead of him? He didn't know. A chance to break through the woods, perhaps. Time! Something might turn up. There was one blur of knowledge in his mind. There was lynching in the air. He had saved Zabrewski from being lynched. That was all, so far. But, wasn't that enough?

Somehow, they had all got into movement, with some semblance of order. There was a scrambling procession—outrunners, late to arrive, trying to get into positions where they could see and hear, others lagging while they explained to friends and chance acquaintances. And, certain as was the next minute and the contents thereof in Craig's mind his heart was informing him that, even so, he knew more than any one else, and that knowledge was power—knowledge was confidence, authority, a chance to survive.

No, he could desert neither Zabrewski nor even Harry, the Goose. How long would it be before he himself was recognized? Where was Warden Green? He looked at the sun. The sun was still at least two hours high—high enough to bring them into Fairhaven, five or six miles away. And, even as some generals are reported to have done, Craig prayed for night. Craig may have prayed for a number of things, without calling it prayer. Once, he put his hand into the inside pocket of his coat and again

touched the little red ledger. It was as if he had touched the hand of her who had given him this book and written out the contents of it.

The book of his indebtedness to life, the world, himself! When all was said that could be said of his present situation, wasn't he doing his best to make payment?

"Yes! Yes!" clamored a thousand voices within himself.

They came into a little wood road, and this brought an advantage in that it forced the crowd to straggle out still more, for the road was narrow and deep, and the sides of it were thickly brushed, so that the outrunners were forced to fall back.

A regular procession now, and, at the head of it, the two prisoners—when would there be three, with himself as one of them? There were Zabrewski and Harry, the Goose, held and protected by Craig, and the four men who had accepted from him with hope of reward their deputyship as they would have accepted commissions under the seal of the United States, no less; and friends of these.

Craig had let it be known that he was from San Pedro Prison, as he was; that he was working for the State, as he was; and that he had the warmest sort of friendship for the new warden of San Pedro, Major Gracie, which was likewise true.

To these deputies of his, Craig also privately imparted a stern warning against letting these prisoners become victims of mob law.

"A disgrace to the State," said Craig, "besides bilking you gentlemen out of what is rightly yours."

"B' jinks!" said squirrel shooter. "Let 'em try it!"

And the old party and his friends tightened their grips on their weapons.

In fact, everything was going as Craig himself

could have desired it—almost! But what about himself? He couldn't escape. His own identification lay just ahead. Then there *would* be a lynching—not of one, or of two, but of three.

But the sun would not come down any the faster for that. And they had left the wood road and come into the highway. There were the first houses of Fairhaven, and crowds—always more crowds. Not only crowds, but noise—always more noise—each moment a little shriller, crueler, more and more like a chorus of yelping howls.

It was this chorus, even more terrifying when heard at a distance than when one was in the thick of it, that had electrified that little party in the Gracie home. The major had hurried away.

And, already, so he was to learn, the local sheriff and chief of police had seen trouble ahead. There, on the outskirts of the town, a policeman or two had tried to preserve order and had been roughly handled. There was laughter. There was ebullition. There was a gluttony for emotion. The town had long been stagnant. Here was something interesting. At the same time, it was something that no one could understand, nor sought to understand, in the fullness of it. Not even the sheriff nor the chief of police, until Major Gracie clarified the whole muddy mixture with a drop of wisdom.

"A lynching!"

There was no local precedent for a thing like this, no local experience.

Major Gracie turned to the sheriff.

"Swear us all in!"

There were some twenty citizens on hand besides the reserve policemen, city judge, clerks, and others. The City Building, with the jail in the back of it, a florid but puny building of brick, was situated on Main Street—a street that was not very wide, but

traversed the town, the only street that led direct from the outskirts to the center of the town.

The mob was headed for the center of the town two or three blocks farther on from the City Building where there was a broad plaza, Courthouse Square.

"They're goin' to hang 'em in Courthouse Square!"

Every one was saying it—apparently. Where had the information come from? No one knew or cared.

"They got Masters, the San Pedro outlaw——"

"And his gang——"

"Goin' to hang 'em in Courthouse Square!"

"Serves 'em right!"

"Fairhaven done it!"

"We'll show 'em!"

"Goin' to hang 'em in Courthouse Square!"

Joan heard it. There was a shudder in her heart. Her whole body had become a shudder. But there was a degree of fierceness in her suffering. This thing wasn't right. What had this man done that he should be treated like this? Had she followed the impulse that sprang from the very essence of her being, she would have attacked the whole world with her bare hands, beating on it with her small fists—and then, how the rough old world would have laughed at the spectacle!

"Do something!" she appealed to Gary Lee fiercely.

"What?"

"To check this mob."

"I'll join your father," said Lee, without grace.

He was as clean and good a citizen as one would have met in a week of travel, but he was angry, hurt. That hot spot in the region of his heart was clinking out sparks again ready to burst into flame.

"Do!" she said.

"But not on his account!"

He thrust out his jaw. She knew whom he meant.

There was an accusation in his words, not against the escaped convict so much as against herself.

"I hate you," she retorted.

"Just the same," he said, "I'm——"

He was going to say that, just the same, he'd marry her. But Joan had flung away from him. Was the prophecy also doomed to remain like that?

It was with a feeling that, over there only a couple of streets beyond, a drama was already under way, that Joan Gracie left her home. She had lingered for her aunt. Age had brought no dimming of interest in the affairs of men to Aunt Katherine, even if the old lady did spend most of her life among her flowers.

But that hint of the theater not built with hands, and of a play already begun not written by man, in which both of these women, the young and the old, felt a vital interest, was accentuated by the wide silence about them, the roar of the multitude over and beyond.

"We can go to Mr. Cantrel's office," cried Aunt Katherine.

Cantrel was her agent. He had an office on Main Street, almost opposite the City Building.

"If we can ever get there," said Joan. "Listen to the crowd."

"There's a back way, through the alley."

"Oh, hurry! Hurry!" panted Joan, and her voice was almost a sob.

There was indeed no time to be lost if they were not to miss the final act of the thing that had begun back there in the woods. The play was rushing to a climax, and that was sure.

Right across Main Street, near the City Building, Major Gracie had drawn up a cordon of police and volunteers. Already, without the publicity of the usual gongs and sirens, the firemen of the town were

taking up their stations in the side streets. There were a number of exigencies that would have to be met, and the major had prepared for them all as best he could.

The prisoners would have to be rescued at once. The mob would have to be dispersed and kept dispersed. At the same time, life and property would have to be defended to the utmost. There could be no shooting down even of those deluded fools who were clamoring for the blood of others.

Who these others were there no longer was any doubt. There was ex-Warden Green, at last.

He had come in from the woods, a disappointed and yet an expectant man. Even he didn't know of the peculiar turn that things had taken. But, from a vantage point, he had caught a glimpse, back there, of convict No. 3777, the man who had won fame to the ex-warden's eternal disgrace.

So Green had joined the cordon that Major Gracie had formed. He towered among the others. It was there that Craig, with the mob all about him, but chiefly back of him, and with his two cowering prisoners in front of him, saw the ex-warden of San Pedro.

To Craig, in the midst of the human whirlwind and earthquake that threatened to engulf him, it was like a vision of San Pedro itself—the old San Pedro —hell!

He cast his eyes up quickly and to one side. He saw Joan Gracie—the mere glimpsing vision of a face at a window, but vivid, compassionate—bidding him to live.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LULL

THERE was a lull in Craig's mind, as swift, complete, final, and impressive, as that which follows the accomplishment of any big event.

And this was a big event to Daniel Craig, the sight of Joan Gracie up there at the window, so close to him, so *with* him when he had believed himself alone. Nothing could have been so unexpected, and yet nothing could have seemed so inevitable—so predestined, as Craig himself would have said.

There had been no lull for the surging mob, though.

Nor were the forces of law and order called together by Major Gracie aware of any lull. In about thirty seconds there was going to be a clash—a summons to halt—a volley in the air—and Heaven only knew what immediately afterward. But, at the first shot, the firemen, safely in the side streets by now, were instructed to turn the water on. No mob likes water.

Nor was there any lull for ex-Warden Green. He began to take in the situation from the moment that he saw Craig again. It wasn't Craig who was coming as one of the prisoners. The prisoners the ex-warden recognized quickly enough—Harry, the Goose, and the organist Zabrewski. Great guns! What was this that Masters was putting over now? Even in these thunderous seconds he could see that, in some way, Masters, the escaped convict, was really at the head of the mob, the leader of it. It wasn't he at all that the mob meant when it chanted death. And the ex-warden began to vociferate the news.

It was almost sundown. The mob was facing west. Such light as there was came slanting and red from straight ahead.

"Halt!" shouted Craig, his mind suddenly clear.

The command was repeated by the squirrel hunter and his friends who were the chief guardians of Harry, the Goose, and Zabrewski.

"Hold up!" "Stop yer shovin!" "Plenty of time, boys!"

Those at the head of the disordered procession were holding back. Even the noisy ones were aware that a crisis impended, stopped yelling, began to call for silence.

Craig spoke rapidly to those about him.

"If you want to save your reward, you've got to save these men."

He spoke with authority. There was no time for argument. He spoke to Harry and Zabrewski. They had been half dead, but his words galvanized them like hot needles:

"Beat it straight ahead!"

They stumbled forward in a shambling run—the two of them.

Zabrewski fell. He was on his feet again.

Twenty policemen, with nightsticks, sprang forward as the mob gave a surge.

Some one, on the mob side, fired a wild shot, and this brought in the trail of it a swishing roar and a chaotic babble of voices in another key as the firemen answered the impromptu signal and turned the water on.

Craig was no longer one of the mob surge. He was a man again, with mastery of his mind, and his mind master of the circumstances that whirled and changed around him. His mind was clear. It perceived many things—that Zabrewski and Harry, the Goose, had been taken in charge by Major Gracie's forces, and

that they were safe. Back of him in the street through which he had just passed, the mob was like a clay bank when attacked under hydraulic pressure. Joan Gracie had disappeared from the window where he had seen her.

He fought. A flat and beefy face as full of rage as a Chinese mask appeared in front of him. He jabbed his fist into it. He saw two straining figures locked together in front of him. He pushed them over.

He had instinctively turned to the right, in the direction of that vision of his. There was a row of brick business buildings there—stores on the ground floor, and offices above. Before he was at the curb, he saw that all doors were closed, that there was likely to be no escape in this direction. But neither was there escape back of him, nor up the street, nor down the street.

He plunged against a wooden door—one of two that closed an entrance way to an office building. Locked! And a roar just back of him.

"It's him himself!" the voice of ex-Warden Green.

Then the door opened. Craig sprang inside and slammed it shut.

He shoved the bolt back into place, he even listened for some fraction of a second before he turned. There at the side of him in the dim light of the hall he saw her as if he had known that she would be there, as if this were an appointed rendezvous.

She stood with her back against the wall, as if she were glad of the wall's support. Seen in this comparative darkness of the hallway, she was little more than a glimmer of white and a pair of eyes. So, at any rate, she appeared to Craig—unreal, unearthly, and yet a fact as unshakable as the floor beneath his feet.

"Look out! He's armed!" This from outside, muffled by the closed doors.

Craig heard the words, but he only heard them with the surface of his brain, so to speak. And the surface of his brain was telling him that there wasn't a moment to lose, that already some elements of the mob and of the force that had been opposed to the mob were uniting against him, would soon be storming this fragile fortress of his.

But he paused.

"You!" he whispered.

There was a look in the girl's eyes of fright, relief, of something else. It was like a look of pure emotion that could be divided into all the elements of feeling, that embraced them all.

"Hurry," she whispered.

She was no longer the masterly creature she had appeared that day in San Pedro. She was more like a child. But if she was like a child, so was Craig. He himself felt that way—a rush of carelessness, happiness, such as he had not experienced since his remotest past.

It was a mood that came and was gone in a second. And what had happened during this second? It was a question that was to haunt pretty much the remainder of his life.

His memory of it was to remain expansive and complex, yet oddly dreamlike, a jumble of impressions.

Then, Joan was running up the stairs to that office where she had left her aunt, and Craig himself was ghosting back through the hall, knowing that there was a way out, back there, and an alley that would bring him to an unfrequented street, but with this other shred of information in his brain overriding all other information, and as necessary to his life:

He had kissed her!

He hurried, but he was as indifferent to the mob he had put behind him, and all its various elements—police, Green, lynchers—as if he had been a spirit and they with no power over him whatsoever. They didn't belong to his order. They were of a different and inferior race.

It must have been Joan who had told him about the alley and the street beyond, but he couldn't remember her having told him. He merely knew what to expect. That was all. He hurried through the alley. He came to the street. He slanted across this—fast enough, but not too fast to arouse suspicion—and came to an unfenced area of unimproved land that had been used, betimes, as a ball field.

Every one seemed to be absent, as if this part of the town were under a spell. Every one had hurried away, apparently, to watch the excitement, the noises of which still reached him, indistinct and confused. And beyond the ball field he saw a freight train trundling into speed.

While this was taking place, Joan Gracie must, herself, have experienced some such thing as had befallen the spirit of Daniel Craig.

She fled up the stairs. At the head of the stairs, she stood for a moment with her hand on her heart. She ran forward to the door of the office she had quitted when instinct told her that Craig was coming this way. At the door of the office she stopped again. She was frightened—not frightened so much as touched with awe; and in her awe there was a riot of something strangely like joy.

She entered the office, and there was no sign that any one had noticed that she had been missing. They were all banked about the windows. No one turned to look at her, not even her Aunt Katherine. She was grateful. She guiltily told herself that not even did it

matter much that her own father was out there in the crowded and disordered street.

As for Craig, he was still on the freight train when the night came on, and he was rolling through a country that was strange to him.

A brakeman passed along the running board at the top of the cars, and when he was safely gone, Craig came up from the bumpers and sat there and looked up. He was like a prophet on a mountaintop, this mountain rumbling along by some special magic. But he looked at the stars as any prophet may have looked at them—with that feeling of prophecy that comes to all men when out in the night alone.

One of the slowly accumulated heritages of the human race, no doubt, this power to draw consolation and wisdom from nocturnal solitude. To this men have always fled when they needed it most; or have been driven to it even when they themselves didn't recognize the healing value of it. Back through the ages the stars have looked down on them all—the dying warriors, the man lost in the desert, the drunkard reeling home, the slave in the canebrake, the fugitive prince.

Toward dawn, the train was going through a region of flat pine woods, and the weather had changed. It was coming on to rain. Faintly in the distance Craig saw a white building that he took to be a schoolhouse. This dawning day was Saturday, he reflected, and so the building would give him shelter and seclusion. He was almost dead with fatigue.

He let himself off the train. He was rather more satisfied than not when he discovered that his building was a church. He tried the door. It was unlocked. The place was in keeping with his mood.

The escape, the kiss, the resolves and the hopes that these had inspired, were the mental elements of another sort of dawn.

CHAPTER XX

THE MAGNET

A STOUT man, rather flabby and down at the heel, had been standing for some time in the Cincinnati post office deeply interested, apparently, in his copy of the *Times Star*. Also he appeared to be rather nearsighted, to judge by the way he held his paper. Only some one close to him would have seen that he wasn't reading the paper at all, and that his eyes, anything but nearsighted, watched furtively all who came and went at the window marked General Delivery.

The day was hot. The post office was airless. Now and then a bead of sweat rolled down the flabby man's face. Now and then a fly sought, and found a landing place on his stubbly cheek. He let the sweat roll. He let the fly hum and forage.

An old colored mammy of the "befo'-de-wah" type waddled past the window, then an anæmic, half-grown girl, and an Italian laborer. These gone, the flabby man with the newspaper cast a final glance about the room. No one visible. He drew a long breath. He stepped up to the window with alacrity.

He spoke a name. The clerk sifted through a handful of letters, tossed one of these aside.

"Where were you expecting it from?"

"Chicago."

The clerk shoved the letter through the window, turned his back. The flabby man also turned, slowly. He was still the only one in the neighborhood of the wicket. He had chosen the right tim

He was safe in the room of a small office of the neighborhood before he opened his mail. The envelope, addressed "James R. Henderson," contained a brief note with no address at all. It read:

> Fishing good and plenty of bait at the old grounds.

The flabby man read this with great satisfaction. With an even greater satisfaction, however, he read an inclosure from the same envelope. This was a newspaper clipping with a San Francisco date line. It stated that the body of a man found in the harbor there had been identified as that of Taylor Leamy, recently escaped from San Pedro Prison, and once known as the king of the slick engineers, one of the most notorious mining swindlers the country had ever known."

The flabby man had lost some of his flabbiness when he had completed his reading. He closed his eyes. He raised his face with a beatific smile.

"Well, well, well," he droned. "I feel pretty chipper for a drowned man at that!"

His mood changed. He glanced about him at the sultry and meager little office. One would have said that the office was personal. He spat at it. His erstwhile flabby face took on a look of ferocious triumph.

"Good night for you!" he gritted. "I'll show 'em whether I'm dead or not. Money! Suckers! A million dollars' worth of stock! And Taylor Leamy hisself again!"

About the same time that this monologue was in course of delivery, there was a dialogue in progress in the back room of a saloon in East St. Louis. It was a sordid place, where this dialogue was staged—

dank and dark, acrid with the effluvia of stale beer and the smell of cold tobacco smoke—but it suited admirably the parties to the conversation. There were sleeping rooms upstairs that could be reached by a flight of stairs from the room itself. The windows of most of these rooms were convenient to the houses next door. Underneath, there was a cellar, also available through an interior stairway, but with a semi-secret exit through an adjoining cellar and thence into a vacant lot.

"It's a neat little dump," said one of the speakers ironically, with a glance for the squalor about him.

He was rather a dandified youth, dark and well barbered; but dandified only according to certain standards. The new cap he wore was pressed down too close to his ears. His necktie, also new, was green and purple.

The man across the table from him was not so neat, although the clothing he wore still had the creases of the store it had come from. It was the man's face, though, that would have kept almost any one from remarking what he wore—a face that was white, exceedingly bitter. It was the face of a monkey that had been bleached and otherwise mistreated.

"It's better'n stir," protested monkey-face, getting the other's irony. "And how in hell am I goin' to change it wit' the bulls and the stools of the whole world layin' fer me?"

The other brought from his pocket a paper which he carefully unfolded and flattened on the table. The paper was a poster. It was headed "$300 REWARD." Then there were a pair of portraits, full face and profile. Under this was the information that the portraits were those of Edward Rogers, alias Trick O'Ray, safe blower, escaped from San Pedro, et cetera, et cetera.

The other compared the portraits with the face of the man opposite him. He refolded the paper complacently.

"He thought of that, too, Trick," said he.

"Who?"

"Three Sevens!"

"Was it him that sent you?"

"Who else? He says to me: 'There's only two birds in the country that I'll trust with this job. One of 'em's Eddie Yarmouth, and he's still in stir out in old San Pedro,' he says. 'The other's Trick O'Ray.' Get me?"

"It's all right fer you to talk, Mike," said Trick, with a gust of temperament. "But you seen for yourself." He was referring to the poster.

" 'At's what I'm telling you, Tricky. Three Sevens, he says, 'Bring Trick a fake birthmark, bring him some woman clothes—some of Violet's, he says. 'She won't need her old ones any more.' "

"For the love of——"

Trick had suddenly clenched, not his fist, but his whole body. A spasm of black passion came into his face.

"What?" he whispered.

"I thought you knew," said Mike.

"What?"

"Everybody's wise."

"Wise *me!*"

"About Violet's takin' up with Benny Jarvis."

"Him!"

"Sure, he comes to Chicago, sees her. Mebbe he don't know she's yours."

"Cut it!" said Trick hoarsely. "He was my pal in San Pedro."

"What's the answer?"

"I'm comin' to Chi to kill him."

"But first," said Mike, "you'll turn this job. What use'll Violet be to you, anyhow, if you're broke?"

By a coincidence which was not strange if all the facts were known—Chicago had become the magnetic pole for yet another late dweller in San Pedro, within the same week. The thing befell when the steamer *Chihuahua*, from Vera Cruz, had barely made her berth in the North River, New York.

A small messenger boy beat the first ship-news reporter up the gangplank and began to bark a name. He didn't pronounce it very well:

"Seenyore Edwardo Cortinnys Y. Ottero!"

A tall and slender man with classic features and a black beard who had already joined the line of passengers waiting to leave the boat called the boy.

"I am," he said, with a slow and precise English, "Señor Cortinez."

"Seenyore Edwardo——" the boy began again, studying the address.

"Si, Señor Eduardo Cortinez y Otero!"

"Sign here," said the boy.

The tall man with the black beard made a mark on the book that might have been a signature or not, staggered the boy with the gift of a Mexican peso which later turned out to be bad, gave a glance about him, opened his message, and read it at a glance.

It took him but a glance to read it, for the message consisted of but two words, and one of these words was presumably the signature:

Official Max.

The message must have been clear, though, as well as brief. As soon as the gentleman of the black beard had read it he crumpled it into a tight ball. He dropped it into the muddy, churning water between

ship and piling. He did this casually, one would have said absent-mindedly; but, at the same time, his eyes were flicking hither and yon, and the muscles of his cheek were twitching, even as a cat's tail twitches at a moment of high tension.

Fear also can serve as a magnetic force, as much as love, or greed, or jealousy.

The recent Count Wolf could have attested to that. Max was to have met him here in New York. And there must have been a reason, good and sufficient, why Max should have wired him from Chicago. As a matter of fact, the reason was amply stated in that one word: "Official." In the vocabulary of both Max and the count, otherwise Señor Eduardo Cortinez y Otero, that one word meant police, Federal agents, judges, prison.

Count Wolf had had enough of "official" for a while. He was going to Chicago as swiftly as he could. He prayed heaven—or hell—that nothing should delay him.

As a matter of fact, all these men—Leamy, Trick O'Ray, Ben Jarvis, and now Count Wolf, were fleeing as lovers elect to keep some mystic rendezvous. Always it happens like that in the affairs of men.

CHAPTER XXI

PARLEY

THAT first Sunday out of Fairfield, Craig had earned his dinner by pumping the organ in that church where he had slept—making it a night and a day to recall his stern upbringing, and awaken the faith of his ancestors.

After that, he had struck north, for no other reason than that he knew that from Chicago came Ben Jarvis, and that Ben's name was next in that red ledger of his. He would have to take Ben. But his plans were vague.

They were, until he came upon the deserted section of a Chicago newspaper—part of a Sunday edition—and found therein two pages devoted to himself. Three Sevens! Napoleon of the Underworld! He was becoming legendary now. There was not only a lurid, but fascinating, story of the great San Pedro revolution, and a corresponding account of what had happened in Fairhaven, but all sorts of crimes and orgies had been attributed to him as well.

He was reported to have broken the heart of an heiress in New York. He was supposed to be the real brains back of a certain big bank robbery in New Orleans. He owed his immunity not only to his own unfailing wit and courage. An army of lesser crooks were ever at his beck and call.

Craig didn't know whether to laugh or cry. There was one thing, though, that he had salvaged from the wreck of his career in college, and that was a rudimentary knowledge of how to think—how to

round up a problem and get it started as a first step in its solution. He did this now. Here was the problem: To use this fame of his to the squaring of the red ledger.

His mind was like a spider, working day and night, spinning on a web the design of which he had no preknowledge, and yet with the spider's persistence—with something also, had he only known it, of the spider's close adhesion to some universal law.

Thinking, perpetually thinking!

It was like the thinking he had done immediately after his disgrace in college, again when he had permitted himself to be condemned for another's crime, again when he was in the dark cell. From one dark cell he had merely escaped into a bigger one. The bigger dark cell was composed of these present circumstances in which he found himself. But, out of this cell also he would think his way and work his way to the final freedom.

There were thoughts like this in his mind one afternoon while he was piling cordwood in a wood yard far out in the outskirts of Chicago. It was a large yard, covering a couple of acres, surrounded by a board fence, with an office and a wide gate at one corner of it. The place had seemed so open and safe, the work of a kind calling for so little mental effort, and the world in general so friendly and peaceful, that he had let himself go in his thinking altogether.

He was so occupied with the spinning of his mind that he never noticed that a small and muddy auto had arrived at the gate of the wood yard, that a man had got down from it, and that this man was ex-Warden Green of San Pedro. The ex-warden had gone into the office.

"Why, let's see," said the proprietor of the place.

"Yes, there was a fellow I hired this morning that answers your description."

The two of them had gone to the door.

"There he is. What did you say he's wanted for?"

Green didn't say. There was a dance of death inside of him, but his exterior was stolid enough—big, bearded. He looked across the yard shimmering in the June sunshine. There was the man who had shackled him, made him the laughingstock of the country. He drew back.

Finally he went out to the muddy little auto and got a sawed-off shotgun.

"You ain't going to shoot him, are you?" demanded the proprietor of the yard.

"Not unless I have to."

"But you can't shoot a man like that."

"I've got a license and a warrant," said Green. "He'll come, all right. Don't you worry about that. But I haven't followed him, foot by foot, all the way from Fairhaven to let him get away from me now."

Craig, still busy with his thought, turned a corner of the woodpile on which he was working. As he did so, he was almost knocked from his feet by a thrust of steel against his breast.

"Don't move!"

He saw the double muzzle of the shotgun. Those black holes were ready to spout fire. He saw Green looming just back of the gun. It was Green who had spoken. Green wasn't so stolid any more. The hands that held the gun had a tremor in them, but it was the tremor of restraint. The hammers of the gun were back. There was a finger on the triggers. Just a little pressure, and Green would have that vindication he was panting for.

Curious; but, even so, Craig was aware that his

brain was spinning again—placidly, as if aware that even this was part of the accepted plan.

"If you shoot me," said Craig softly, as if speaking with the internal voice of his mind, "you'll shoot an innocent man."

"Stick 'em up," said Green.

Craig did so, slowly, not very high. He heard voices and a sound of running. In a couple of minutes there was going to be an audience. He was willing. Green was the man to shoot him here back of the woodpile so long as they were alone. He was not the man, perhaps, to do it if there were others there to see.

"Green, you're a fool," said Craig.

The fire blazed in the other's eyes. He mouthed an epithet through his beard, as if to justify in his own mind the act he secretly meditated.

"The truth will come out."

"You're damn right!"

"About—some one—dear to you."

"I'll make you keep your trap shut, you——"

"And you'll wish you'd shot yourself instead. Do you know——"

"Turn round, and keep your hands up!"

"—why I went to prison?"

"Yes."

"Ask your soul if you're certain."

There was no telling what response may have come back to Green from his soul. It was something that caused his hand to shake. He was remembering, moreover, in this connection, certain queer remarks, certain unforgettable hints, that convict No. 3777 had dropped that day ot the great delivery. Curiosity, secret dread—these things existed in the soul of Green as much as, and maybe a trifle more, than they exist in the souls of most men who go up and down the earth.

"Stallin', are you?" demanded Green coarsely, and he forced his laugh. "Turn round, you pup."

"You'll never laugh again," said Craig, himself remembering what he had said on a former occasion. "Murder—such black murder! When the truth comes out."

Was this fellow referring, somehow or other, to Amy? The man with the shotgun wondered. Strength was dribbling from him as from a leaky pail. But he summoned his strength into solider shape—something frozen and cold, like ice.

But Craig himself was as an intelligence disembodied, all mind. There had been a score of men at work in the yard, mostly about some coal piles on the other side. A couple of these cautiously appeared from around a woodpile back of Green. A teamster climbed on the pile itself at the side of Craig.

"Keep 'em up, and turn round," said Green.

"Murder," Craig repeated, and didn't move. The audience was growing. He had spoken just now for the others.

"What's this?" demanded the teamster on the woodpile.

"I'm an officer of the law," said Green.

"Prove it," said Craig.

He could see without looking that the teamster on the woodpile was gripping a stick of cordwood. The teamster might have been as pure as the driven snow, but, again, he himself might have served a prison sentence. He was a type of man Craig recognized—impulsive, whole-hearted, especially when it came to serving the underdog, brave as a lion. Maybe the ex-warden of San Pedro also recognized the type.

"Men——" he began.

Right then the tension broke. There had been a slight unflexing of the hand controlling the triggers. Craig struck—down! There was the suspended

flash of fire, a roar. But the charge had passed Craig's knee, kicked up chips and dust on the earth as he sprang back.

Even so, Green might have got him with the other barrel, but the teamster banged down his stick of wood just as the gun roared again. Then Green was snatching at his revolver.

Craig went. He took the fence. He followed the fence around to a corner where he saw a couple of men running toward the wood yard from a corner saloon. Up the unbuilt street he saw a policeman turn and stare.

There was a path leading down through deep weeds to a belt of marsh partly filled in with ashes and other débris. Craig went through the weeds and looked back. He saw that others were scaling the fence and looking about them. Before he could get out of sight, some one saw him, let out a whoop.

He ran out across the filled-in land and plunged over the edge of it. For a while he was following the slope of it. He couldn't turn back. He dared not try the bog. It looked too treacherous. But, at the same time, from the sounds that reached him, he knew that the chase had begun, and that some of his pursuers were headed to cut him off.

He took a chance and stepped out into the bog where it looked as if it might be solid enough to hold him. The first step sent him down into the mud almost to the knees, but he floundered on.

Now it was a little better, now it was worse. But with every step he was losing seconds. He heard shouts not far back of him, then something that sounded like a command.

There was a shot—a revolver shot, this time. But whether it was Green or the policeman who was using him for a target he didn't stop to investigate. He struggled on.

That first shot had been sent high, most likely. He hadn't heard the bullet. He was hearing bullets now. Some of them plumped in the mud. Some whined past his head. He gained a bit of ground that was solider than that through which he had just passed. There was an old log of a fallen tree. He crawled back of this for a breathing spell.

He saw that he wouldn't have much farther to go before reaching the edge of a muddy stream—whether river or drainage ditch, canal or open sewer, he didn't care. The stream was an ally.

Beyond the stream there was a level acreage of railroad tracks, these covered with cars—freight cars and passenger cars. Once across the stream and among those cars he would be like a mouse in a wheat field.

With only a glance and scarcely a thought for those back of and to either side of him—they were all distant—he plunged on ahead through the remainder of the morass. Again the bullets "plopped" or whined. But there was only one thing that worried him, now, even for a moment. It was the fear that the mud on the edge of the stream would be so soft and the water so shallow that he wouldn't have a chance to swim.

Even this fear was no sooner flickering in his mind than it had flickered out. On the bank of the stream nearest him was a derelict barge. He gained this, slid out into deep water.

The papers carried a bit of this story also that evening. The stories and the headlines differed with the different papers, but what was in one was typical of them all—"Wild West Scene in Chicago Suburb!" "Rube Sheriff Uses Shotgun!" "Masters, Famous Bandit, Swims to Freedom!"

Craig read this and much else in the corner of a

crowded saloon well within the frontiers of the big town of the lakes. He had come to Chicago on a criminal chase of his own. But now he knew that the police of Chicago were looking for him. He himself had heard here and there while on the road that here in Chicago were the favorite haunts of other such men as Trick O'Ray, Ben Jarvis, and even the famous swindler, Taylor Leamy.

But what were any of these compared to himself—his mythical self—Masters, Three Sevens, the man who had cut himself from an iron box and accomplished the greatest jail delivery in all history!

He kept his eye on the crowd about him—tramps and other hangers-on of the railroads, mostly. Was he doomed to pass his life among such as these? Then he perceived a small difference in one part of the crowd—something that was hard to define. It was as if the interest in the room, say, had been fluid, but in this one particular place had coagulated or solidified.

He heard a sibilant whisper:

"Me mither's ghost! If it ain't Three Sevens himself!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE UNDERWORLD

IT was Jim Bartow, the man who had occupied cell No. 1 of the punishment block, back there in San Pedro. Not a bad sort. He had tried crime as an experiment. The experiment had failed.

Craig answered a signal, and without haste, with all that elaborate but stealthy watchfulness which Craig himself had learned was as much a part of the lives of the hunted in big towns as it was in the jungle, he and Bartow were outside.

"This way," said Bartow.

He led the way down a narrow passage at the side of the building they had left. They came into a dark yard. Here Bartow listened long. He beckoned Craig to follow.

There was much of the jungle beast about this guide, Craig reflected. His shoulders sloped. His strength and agility were disguised by an apparent looseness and weakness of build. It was the head that made a difference. Bartow's head also contained a sort of thinking machine, said Craig to himself, and it was working now.

"I came there to warn another pal of mine," said Bartow, after a while. "I got the tip straight that the bulls were out to-night for an old-fashioned clean-up, all over the town, on account of that mess you was in to-day over at the wood yard. You're great."

From the back yard of the saloon they had come into the rear areaway of a block of tenement build-

ings. They went through the basement of these into a shabby and shadowy street. They crossed this to a vacant lot. At the next street they stopped. Not more than a couple of hundred yards away a patrol wagon had halted near the curb. Policemen were piling out of it.

"The tip was straight," breathed Bartow.

Craig didn't speak.

Bartow, by a roundabout course, had brought Craig to a tumble-down shanty in the corner of a vacant lot. There he lit a lantern and started to make coffee over a smelly oil stove.

"Me, I'm no good," Bartow explained indulgently. "I got started too late. The live ones, like in every other line, are specialists these days. Am I right or am I wrong? The yeggs are yeggs. The Dutch-house-men are Dutch-house-men. But you—holy smoke! I been reading what the papers been printing about you—you're an all-round genius."

"I hope you lay off the crooked stuff, Bartow," said Craig, out of his reflection.

"Sure."

"What are you doing now?"

"Night watchman." And Bartow vaguely indicated the cabin and the vacant lot beyond. "It's a political job."

"Political?"

"Sure." He gave Craig a survey of the situation. Almost every one would be taken care of, until after election. The election was going to be close. The reformers were getting together. "All any one has to do to get a job," said Bartow, "is to see Artie the lawyer."

"Who's he?"

"The man who hands out all the jobs and looks out for the 'bos and the crooks."

"That's me," said Craig.

Bartow laughed. "I guess you won't be broke for long," he said. "Still, you'd better see Artie if you're thinking of staying in Chicago for a while. He'll see that the dicks leave you in peace, at least until after election."

It was early morning when Craig found the Jake Exchange Bar, which Bartow had informed him was the throne room of the lawyer he had come to seek. The bar was a heavy and glittering oasis in the midst of a crowded but dull and squalid neighborhood. And, early as it was, Artie was there, like a good magistrate, ready to straighten out the human tangles of the night.

Craig looked at him with interest—a small man with a keen but degenerate face, a sagging lower lip and flapping ears, a big, soft, pendulous nose; only his eyes were hard, glittering hard, and small and cynical, and yet with something very human back of them—his vast fund of purely human wisdom, perhaps.

Artie was leaning against the bar in a disconsolate attitude as Craig drew near him. Artie hadn't raised his head, but Craig knew that he had been observed. Craig even felt a certain liking for this chancellor of the underworld. At least, here was an intelligence.

There *was* an underworld, Craig told himself, a little later on. Artie had given him a card with a name scribbled on it, and this was to serve him as a passport should the guardians of the law try to lay hands on him.

He passed through crowded streets. He saw the cars crowded with those who were going to work. Other crowds were about him—intent, clean, human, faithful, brave. And these were the people on whom that underworld battened—these girls and boys, men and women, who worked—worked—worked! They

didn't know it, but he would be fighting for them, from now on, forever. So he told himself. And it was from this thought that his courage came.

Then Craig took an elevator to a small anteroom on one of the upper floors of a skyscraper. From beyond the door there came a click of typewriters, a vague smell of paper and ink. An office boy, with an eye for Craig's old clothes, asked him whom he wanted to see.

"The man who wrote this," said Craig, and he showed the pages of the Sunday story he had read.

"What do you want to see him for?"

"To give him a better story."

"You got to see the Sunday editor," said the boy, "and he ain't here."

Craig was about to turn away, when a tall young man with sandy hair and hazel eyes stepped from the elevator. The young man looked at Craig with a friendly but frank curiosity.

"Who is it for?" he asked.

"The Sunday editor," Craig answered for himself.

"What do you want to see him about?"

"I had a story."

"What sort of a story?"

"About"—Craig smiled—this man not much older than himself was easy to talk to—"well, all about this matter of San Pedro, and the mob at Fairhaven. You see, I'm the man——" Craig paused. "May I ask who you are?"

The office boy almost fainted—twice: once when he heard Craig's statement, again when he heard Craig's question.

Said the young man with the gray eyes and the sandy hair: "I'm Courtney."

"Connected with the paper?"

"Why, yes. I happen to own it. Come on in."

It wasn't merely an inheritance of great wealth

that had made Richard Courtney a man of prominence in the newspaper business, any more than it was the good salaries he paid that made his paper a power in politics. A year or so of journalism made cynics out of most men. It had made no cynic of Courtney. His interest in humanity had been survived a half-dozen years of exceedingly active politics.

With an air of nonchalance he conducted Craig through a large room where young men sat in their shirt sleeves hammering at the typewriters Craig had heard.

Some of them looked up, then went on with their work. It was nothing new for the chief to come in with a man in old clothes. He was always doing that. He had all sorts of friends. And some said it was a pose. But stories often resulted—queer stories of obscure tragedy, or humor, or of the underside of movements in mines and wheat fields, forests and shipping.

The chief and his caller disappeared into the former's private office. They hadn't been there long before the buzzer rang. The office boy who answered the call came back and summoned the boy in the anteroom. The boy from the anteroom entered the private office and stood at awed attention. The chief and the ragged caller were smoking, had the appearance of friends.

"Benny," said the chief, "what did this gentleman say about himself just now at the door?"

"Nuttin'," said Benny, with prompt intuition.

"You'll make a good newspaperman, Benny," said the chief seriously. "If any one asks you, tell them the same thing. Go tell Mr. Barden that I said he's to raise your pay. That's all. And now——" The chief had turned again to Craig.

"I'd feel better about this," said Craig, after a time, "if I were earning my own money. I want to

work. I'm crazy to work. I'm an engineer—or expect to be one. I don't want gifts."

"Gifts," said Courtney. "Are you aware what a story like this will be worth to a property like mine?"

"No, I was thinking only of its value to the community and myself. Meanwhile, I want to work."

Courtney regarded his visitor thoughtfully. He said:

"Work for me for a week or a month. There's no time to lose, if we are to get Wolf up from Mexico, locate Leamy, and bring him back. Anyway, to do the thing right you'll need more money in the next thirty days or so than you could ever earn and be honest."

"How do you know"—Craig hesitated for a moment before completing the question—"that I am honest?"

"How do you know"—Courtney also hesitated—"that I'm honest myself?"

"It's a case of trust," said Craig. "When I came here, I was merely trusting myself and people in general. I was going to tell my story, tell what I was trying to do, what I had done in the past, and expected to do in the future."

"That was a good scheme, too," said Courtney. "It always is, if a fellow's straight. But so few of us are straight enough. And, anyway, you can always do that later on if things don't go the way we expect them to. Is it all understood?"

"I think so."

"Let me repeat: First, to the cashier with your order for funds. Second, what you need in the way of clothes and things. Third, a room at the Ritz-Astor——"

"As Daniel Craig."

"As Daniel Craig, and fourth, a conference tonight—formal dress—in suite No. 53 with the district

attorney. From this time on none of us must ever be seen together."

Those friends were right who said that all of Richard Courtney's brains were not under the hats of high-priced editors. Craig felt that this was the truth as he stepped into the street. He had Courtney's money in his pocket. In exchange for this Courtney had only his word. Yet Courtney had somehow divined that he, Craig—escaped convict, "Napoleon of the Underworld"—held that given word more precious than his eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LETTER

AS Craig looked at himself in the long mirror of his own room in the Ritz-Astor, that evening, there was no vanity in him, but he was satisfied with the appearance that he made. Any man would have been. He was the figure of a man to stir the admiration of men as much as of women—tall, supple, narrow-waisted, broad and flat as to the shoulders.

He had dined in his room, at Courtney's suggestion. He glanced at the small electric clock on the mantel. Eight thirty. Time for the meeting in suite No. 53.

Craig had the comfortable feeling that neither did Courtney find anything amiss with his appearance. Courtney was just a bit relieved, perhaps. The district attorney was frankly surprised. He was an elderly man, nervous and alert, and was also groomed to perfection. His gray hair was curly and parted in the middle, the smooth waves of it giving a rather effeminate air to his shaven face. Also, his voice had a prettiness of accent and intonation that would have been reckoned effeminate perhaps—except by those who knew his record or had heard him in court.

"Mr. Craig, Colonel Bird."

The two shook hands.

"Mr. Craig," said the colonel, without loss of time, "Mr. Courtney has told me about you. I dare say things will turn out nicely. Has he told you about political conditions here in the county? No? Well, it will require but a word. I happen to have

the honor to be the candidate again of the coalition. You've heard about that. No? Well, I detest the word, but it will perhaps make it clearer to you when I call them the Reformers—the better elements. How about it, Courtney?"

"Right! That's why I'm backing you."

"Thank you, sir. And opposed to me I have the other part of the community, particularly the criminal elements, both little and big—and with excellent reason. Am I overstating it, Courtney?"

"Not at all, colonel; not at all."

"And, as occasionally happens in even the best of communities, I have established, in my own mind, that the police and the crooks are again in collusion. You will understand, sir, that I have devoted a large part of my life to fighting corruption. If I err, Courtney, I'll be grateful if you set me right."

"You haven't erred yet, colonel."

"The point is, as I take it, to establish this collusion in such a striking way that the great masses of citizens—I detest the term, but the proletariat, let us say—the great majority of whom are always honest, will be impressed. Nothing does impress them unless it is hammered into their skulls. I do not wish to exaggerate, but they must see that this collusion actually and as a matter of fact does exist."

"Yes, sir," said Craig.

"You are pledged, I apprehend, to the taking of certain well-known and notorious offenders."

"Yes, sir."

"In that case, it is one of my prerogatives to assist you in every way I can. Let us suppose that you were to assemble these offenders in a certain place, at a certain time, when they will have had reason to believe that they had bought immunity from the police—not all the police, mind you, the great majority of

whom are always honest—but the principals. I believe there are such, Courtney."

"You said it, colonel."

"Then, let us suppose that my men should accomplish the arrest without the cognizance of the police, and that this should occur just about a week before election."

"Two weeks," said Courtney.

"Two weeks," amended the colonel. "But, of course, the criminals arrested should have to be of a certain eminence, a certain notoriety."

"How would Leamy do?" asked Craig.

"Excellent!"

"And Trick O'Ray, the safe blower?"

"Excellent! Most excellent!"

"Then, Count Wolf?"

"Really! Really! Courtney, is this possible?"

"Worth trying, colonel. It's got to be big, or we can't win with even you on the ticket—not even with your record!"

"And Ben Jarvis," said Craig. "I think that I can get him, also. I understand that he's hiding out here in town, somewhere."

"Ben!" exclaimed the colonel with warmth. "He was one of the first men I ever sent to prison."

"I hope to do most of this myself," said Craig. "It's a personal debt. But I may need the help of your office and of Mr. Courtney's paper in getting a line on various friends and past performances of the men we're after."

After Craig said good night to his rich and powerful friends a little later he dared let his thought go, almost for the first time, openly and without apology, to Joan Gracie.

He had returned to his room.

He thoughtfully undressed. He pulled on a bathrobe. His eye rested on a writing desk. Paper, pen,

and ink silently approved his longing, bade him to write to her. He seated himself at the desk.

When Joan Gracie received the letter that Craig had written her, she was in an instant tremor.

She read his letter twice:

> DEAR JOAN:
>
> I think about you very often. It gives me strength. I want all the strength in the world, and I'll have it, too. The red ledger is not a debt. It's an asset. But I am fixing to pay off the debt in it, and become rich, and powerful and great, to justify your faith in me. Think of it! I am Daniel Craig again. I have a beautiful room here in the great and palatial Ritz-Astor. And I have friends whose faith also I'll justify in justifying yours. It's not in any ordinary way, and I know you will understand how I mean it, when I sign myself,
>
> Yours truly,
>
> DANIEL CRAIG.

The queer thing was that she did understand. She understood in all the ramifications of the word. Had she been Craig's mother she could not have understood better, nor if she had been Craig himself.

She had been sitting on the porch of her home in Fairhaven. Heavily screened with vines, it had the seclusion of a room, and she wasn't expecting callers. She certainly wasn't expecting the caller who came.

It was Gary Lee. Gary had, or thought he had, sufficiently quenched the burning in his bosom to come and see Joan again. He wasn't going to apologize to her. Not that. On the other hand, it was absurd that a mere convict could come between him

and her. And, well—there went that glow of heat in his breast again, as if he were jealous, as if it were imaginable that Joan could possibly prefer a convict to the only son of the Lees.

But, about a minute before Gary arrived, Aunt Katherine, who had continued to live with Joan ever since the riot, while a gardener cared for her flowers, called to Joan for some small service or other, and Joan had bounced to obey. She wasn't there when Gary came up to the porch, but the disorder she had left was eloquent of her recent presence and of her certain return.

Gary, perfectly at home, strolled toward the hammock. He was going to stretch himself out in the hammock, light his pipe, and then, when he heard Joan come, pretend that he was asleep. There'd be a laugh when she saw him—no awkward embarrassment.

But there were a couple of letters in the hammock, tossed there, ready for mailing.

Gary picked them up. He was as innocent as a new-born babe. By sheer accident, or some devil inspiration, and still without thought of evil, his eye fell on the address:

DANIEL CRAIG, ESQ.

He gasped.

Then the Maltese terrier began to bark, and he heard Joan coming. He had time to drop the letter back to the hammock, but not time to readjust his expression, let alone to escape. The flame was in his heart. The heat of it was in his face.

Joan saw that something was up instantly. She had been glad to see him. Now she stopped short.

"Well?" she said.

There was no use bluffing. Anyway, that was for-

eign to their natures, especially in their own relationship.

"I saw your letter by accident," said Gary.

"That's all right, Gary." She had an urge to consolation. "Sit down."

Gary sat down. He wanted to master himself, but his desire to protest was the greater.

"Writing to him?" he said.

"Yes."

" 'Daniel Craig, Esquire!' "

"If you've come here to quarrel with me——"

"I came here to call—make up—ask you to take a spin, and I find——"

He stopped. His voice was getting husky. He was trembling with rage. Joan felt sorry for him. Her family and his had been friends. He and she had been playmates. His temper was a disease. She tried to reason with him.

"Gary, you have everything in the world—a good name, a good family, wealth, a fine brain——"

"Bah!"

"Every one says so. Don't you think it would be the nice thing, and the noble thing, to be a little charitable?"

"Pleading for him, are you?"

"I'm pleading for you," she said gently.

"I need it more than he does."

"You're here. You're hurt."

"I know I'm hurt. I'll admit it. You know I can't tolerate this—this felon intruding himself into your life. You don't care. You encourage him."

"I want to encourage him," said Joan steadily, "but not the way you mean."

"What, in Heaven's name, is your father thinking about?"

"He himself is now convinced that Craig was never guilty of the crime for which he was punished."

"You persuaded him."

Joan slowly shook her head. "There's a man in San Pedro now who heard a boy in Chicago tell about the shooting—a boy who takes drugs. The boy says he himself shot the man Beekman."

"This letter writing, I mean. What does your father think of that?"

"He doesn't know anything about it."

"He doesn't?"

"For two reasons. He's always trusted me in such matters. And this is the first letter I've written."

"Then tear it up."

"No."

"Tear it up! Joan, tear it up!"

"Gary, you're unreasonable."

"Unreasonable! I love you. I'm going to make you marry me. I find you writing to an outlaw, an escaped convict—dazzled by his fame, Napoleon of the Underworld! Bah! And I tell you—you call me unreasonable——"

He hadn't been speaking very loudly, but he had gradually been letting his passion get the better of him. He went incoherent. His voice was strangled. He seized the letter from the hammock and lacerated it with his fists.

It was all up, all over. There was never going to be a marriage of Joan Gracie and Gary Lee. Knowledge of this possibly came to both of them right then and there. Perhaps neither of them, in spite of Lee's declarations, had ever suspected before just what a large place this possibility had had in their lives. It had been a mountain in the mental landscapes of both of them, even in Joan's. Now the mountain was gone.

The surprising discovery was not a signal for fresh passion, not of emotion, even. The resultant coldness between them, as they stood there and faced

each other on the porch, could not be called emotion. It was a vacuity; still, with that hint of an ache in it which vacuity so often entails.

"I—didn't—mean to go so far," said Gary.

"Sit down," said Joan.

He reseated himself. He lit a moody cigarette. His eyes were on the floor of the porch. There was a passage of seconds before he found that he was looking at the letter he had twisted. He picked it up. He returned it to the hammock. Joan also had seated herself. She made a blind movement to pick up a bit of sewing.

Her eyes were down. He looked at her.

"You know how I feel," he said.

She gave him a bright look. It was manifest there was no anger in her at all.

"I think I do, Gary."

"Then what's the trouble all about?"

"It's because," she hesitated, "I don't want you to think me unjust."

"Say it."

"It's because you don't seem to know how other people feel."

He meditated.

"We might as well beat this thing out."

"Yes."

"You've known me all your life—known my family, my family history."

"We've quarreled and made up," said Joan. "If your sister, Alice—you know how she and I loved each other even when we were mere babies—if Alice had lived, she couldn't have taken a greater interest and pride in you than I have, Gary."

"Yet you let this convict—that's what he is; there's no use in mincing matters—wreck our friendship."

"It's you who are wrecking it, Gary."

"In what way?"

"By your injustice—by trying to dictate to me."

"I won't stand by and see you ruin yourself and your father. This fellow isn't worth it. All the jailbirds in the country aren't worth it. If you're blind I'll show you the light."

"In what way?"

"First, by putting him back behind the bars, where he belongs."

"And if he doesn't belong there?"

"But he does. He broke jail. That's a felony in itself. He compounded the felony by turning the others loose."

"But there is evidence that he is innocent, that he should never have gone to prison."

"That's irrelevant. I know where he is. It's my duty—my double duty, in the light of all that I know, and have done, to get him back."

He got up. His anger was warming again, but this time his brain was in control.

"Gary!"

"I'm going to send a telegram."

"Stop! You mustn't."

"Why?"

"In a little while—just a little while—he'll be pardoned. And in the meantime he is trying to pay a debt."

Gary laughed.

"There'll be high times," he said, "when women are running things: sentimentality for justice, intuition instead of logic."

It was his tone more than his words that made Joan flare. All of her carefully suppressed feeling of a little while ago began to show through her reserve like little tongues of flame.

"You're silly."

"Am I?"

"You're making yourself unhappy, and you're mak-

ing others unhappy. I don't care. Do what you want to."

"It's just because you don't care that I'm going to straighten this thing out." He looked at his watch. "I'll wire the governor. There is just about time to get the requisition papers through. Our man ought to be on his way back to San Pedro by to-morrow night."

He picked up his hat. She blocked his way, panted into speech.

"You talk about caring. You! What a mockery it was! You, who pretended to love me, who talked of my marrying you! What a mockery it was! You!"

"I started out to say something along that line," he said tensely, but quietly enough. "You turned me off. I offered you everything I have and am. You seem to prefer this outlaw."

"I'm not considering him as an outlaw."

"Perhaps you're considering him as a friend."

"What if I should?"

"I dare say he'd be delighted."

"Do you want to read the letter that he wrote me?"

"No, I do not."

"There's nothing in it that any one might not read. You're wronging him, Gary."

"By heavens, Joan," he exploded—still softly—"you'll end by making me think that you're in love with this brute."

"He's not a brute."

"You do love him."

"Maybe I do."

"The daughter of Major Gracie in love with——"

"Keep quiet! Don't talk to me! Love! You don't know the meaning of the word. You babble it as if it were a plaything or an acre of land."

"I loved you long enough."

"You never did. You wanted me for yourself! You meant to take me for yourself! And you called that love!" Her voice faltered a little. She bit her lip. She turned her face away. But immediately she was facing him again, her eyes darker than usual, blue and liquid fire. "And it's giving—not taking—that is love."

For a moment longer they were facing each other, each of them a frail human dike to the big emotions storming back of them; or, rather, perhaps, the head of an arrow in a bent bow.

Their eyes were clashing, but neither spoke, as Gary passed the girl and descended the steps.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN THE THROES

FROM that first interview of his with the field marshals of the reform movement, Craig had slipped back again into the camp of the enemy. There was that girl named Violet, whom Bartow had incidentally mentioned to him as a friend of Trick O'Ray. Through her he had learned of the hiding place of Ben Jarvis.

Dangerous business, with danger lurking around a dozen corners; a nether region, sure enough, where all was darkness, figuratively speaking, and the nerves of the inhabitants thereof were what might be expected of the nerves of those who live in the dark. Each one uncertain as to what the next minute might show; each one ready to strike his neighbor; with friends and foes all intermingled; no man or woman fully trustful of any one but himself or herself.

Something of an event, though, the arrival of this distinguished stranger known and honored as Three Sevens.

It didn't matter very much where he came from, or what his remote ancestors were. He was young. He was good to look at. He apparently had all the money in the world. He was famous. He had emptied a prison single-handed. Here he was, still at large, defying arrest, with all the audacity of a pirate walking the streets of old Charleston.

It wasn't only the audacity, though, that appealed to Violet's heart. Here was a gentleman. Where did she get it—that hankering for politeness and con-

sideration? Where did the flower, her namesake, get its hankering for sun and air? Violet was young. Violet was comely.

There was another lady—a lady, perhaps, the other way round. That is to say, well-bred, educated, beautiful, costumed like a Fifth Avenue heiress. The lady who was the friend of Max, who was the friend of Count Wolf. And yet, so they said, a lady who would have poisoned one's wine as quickly as anybody, should that be necessary—either on her own account or on account of any one with sufficient power or sufficient money to get her to act.

"La Marebello"—the Marebello—some even called her the Princess Marebello!

With her also Craig became acquainted. In her also it is just possible that Craig may also have awakened some faint murmur of long-forgotten voices. How strange, when he was so young, that he should hold so aloof from flattery, from wooing.

It was she who told Craig not only about Max and Count Wolf, and where the latter could be reached, and most hastily brought to Chicago; she gave him also queer bits of information from high official sources, things that ensnared his reputation, gave him moments of uneasiness, made him hasten his plans.

For example, she told him that Artie, the lawyer, had been arrested.

"By the police?"

No, not by the police, but by the detectives attached to the district attorney's office, and that the maneuver had thrown a scare into certain persons.

"The crooks?"

No; the police; especially the head of the police system; to be particular, into the stout person of Captain Fleyenhall.

"Who's Fleyenhall?"

Didn't he know? What a baby he was! Ah, my

dear little Three Sevens! Why, Fleyenhall was the real ruler of the police department, the minister plenipotentiary—the Marebello could use words like that—of all the crooked politicians.

There was even a third woman, a retired little widow in a retired little street, who had lost all her money once in a crooked mining scheme, with the crookedness whereof the widow, needless to say, had nothing to do. And it was to her house that the once wealthy and powerful Taylor Leamy, reported dead in San Francisco as the result of a drowning accident, but none the less very much alive, was directed to seek lodging. Lodging the widow gave him. It was a quiet retreat—just such a retreat as Leamy loved when lying low, waiting for the big money to come his way again.

Complicated, yet simple, the problem that confronted Craig. He was at times like a keeper in a cage of wild animals—one of those so-called "happy families," where polar bear and tropic snake, the big cats and fear-crazed apes are congregated under the will—the cruel will and the fateful will—of the animal god, man.

Craig felt himself such a keeper, more than once, with full knowledge that a little flinching, a slight misstep, would spill his blood in the sawdust.

More often, though, when he closed his eyes, he saw himself at the center of a whirling vortex. It was like one of those photographs of a tailless comet, or of a spiral nebula where a brand-new world is taking shape.

And now into the whirling nebula of this new universe that was forming for him, there had entered the greatest force of all forces—greater than the forces that swing the stars through space—love! Otherwise, would the nebula have been there at all? Prob-

ably not in his case, at any rate, nor in the case of any man.

He carried Joan's photograph with him wherever he went. She had sent it to him. It was his fetish, his lucky charm.

It made him sure of himself when he was luring Count Wolf up from his retreat beyond the Mexican border, enticing Leamy from his hiding place in Cincinnati, getting Trick O'Ray to crawl out of his rat hole over there in East St. Louis, and then preventing Trick from taking the life instantly of the too gallant Ben Jarvis, who had held up and shot the new warden on the very day of his escape from San Pedro.

Craig actually was accomplishing a work that no ordinary detective could have accomplished.

Those men he was after knew that their days of utility to the real ruler of the underworld were past, Prison had soured and embittered them. They were no longer the gay and gallant creatures they had been in the past: older, shrewder, wickeder, more avid and desperate of success. They were flecks in the nebula, and they themselves were electric and as devoid of mercy as shooting stars as they neared the vortex. It took a power like Craig's to set them in motion, direct their orbits to the lines of eventual order.

No stool pigeon could have moved very far in this business without getting shot or dirked.

Nor, as Craig was increasingly aware, were these criminals he was after the dominant elements in this tightening whirl of movement of which he was the vortex.

There was the political campaign which had come to be, to a large measure, a part of the same labor of creation. It was a hot campaign. It was vital. So several million human beings were regarding it—themselves like stardust in motion—part of a planetary movement in which they were all engaged, but

over which they had no control. You could see it by the way they read their papers as they swung from workshop to home, from home to workshop, or pressed around the soap-box orators in the streets at night, or jawed each other in saloons and clubs.

Caught in the same movement were others whose presence in it had not been divined by either Craig's friends, Courtney and Colonel Bird on the one hand, or Craig's enemies—the crooked politicians, and big Captain Fleyenhall—on the other.

The governors of two sovereign States were wrangling—still in secret, so far as the public was concerned—as to whether or not Craig should be extradited. Not Craig, but Thomas Masters, No. 3777, on the rolls of San Pedro.

Ex-Warden Green, of San Pedro, had himself been arrested by an officer of the district attorney's office, and had then been released on his promise to go home, with his double-barreled shotgun; but it was only to be picked up again in a friendlier fashion by another detective, from police headquarters this time, who advised him to stay in town.

Green also was whirling around that vortex, which was Daniel Craig. He was to whirl faster yet before long.

It was Artie the lawyer who was going to see to that. Artie himself was whirling to a certain extent, as if he himself had been caught in the drag of some planetary current that was spinning him to an unknown destination.

Yet Artie wasn't altogether blind as to what was going on, either. In fact, it was his knowledge of what might be going on a little later that had caused Artie to cast off the moorings of a lifetime and join the aforesaid whirl.

Secretly Artie was getting ready to abandon the

crooks and all their works. Not merely because Artie had had a bad hour with Colonel Bird. Nor was it merely because Artie believed that the reformers were going to carry the present campaign. Often enough in the past he had followed the boss into temporary retirement. Such retirements always were temporary. There had always been compensations, moreover, for any reversal that might befall at the polls. It was nothing so big as a political campaign that could have shifted Artie from his safe and comfortable berth at the Jake Exchange.

No, it was a little thing. After all, it isn't the storm that wrecks the ship tied up at the wharf. It's the dropped match, or a rat, or an inch of faulty insulation.

The little thing in Artie's case was a certain young man he had always known as Brewster, who had come to him first as a shivering but fairly decent country boy, confessing that he had killed a man, on his sister's account, and asking what he should do. He had advised the boy. Now the boy was a wreck.

The whole scene had come back to Artie one night while he was sitting in the presence of Captain Fleyenhall sipping champagne.

Artie was no fool; not in the ordinary sense of the word. That night, as he had sat there sipping champagne, a certain fact had kept knocking at the door of that inner chamber of his consciousness where he kept so many secrets locked in. But he had to find out for sure the boy's real name.

There were great forces in motion, assuredly. And even more than Craig himself perceived, was he the vortex of them. So far as he was concerned, he had directed some of these forces with wisdom and care.

It was coming toward five o'clock, at a season of the year when this meant early twilight. In the cor-

ridors of the office building the lights had already been turned on, but the only light in the office itself was that of the afterglow that came in through the western windows. Craig turned from one of these windows in response to a knock at the door. Who was it? He had a hand on the revolver in the side pocket of his coat as he stepped over to the door and threw it open.

At first all that his eyes would tell him was that a girl was standing there. Beyond this he could scarcely believe his eyes. He had been thinking of Joan. Here she was. It was too much like magic.

"Joan!"

He stepped back. She entered. It was she who closed the door. She looked at him for a moment in silence. She was as if short of breath. But almost instantly she smiled slightly. She put a hand to her breast.

"I was frightened," she confessed.

"Come over and sit down," he said. She followed him toward a chair. His mind was in a riot. So it was really she. This was no magic after all, other than the magic of all natural events. "I didn't know that you were in Chicago."

"We just arrived," she said.

"You and your father?"

"Yes."

"I shall be glad to see him."

"We came on your account."

"On my account? How did you find me here?"

"You were in danger," gasped Joan.

"I've been living in danger."

"I know."

"And your father?" Craig asked.

"He was delayed. I think he may have been delayed for a purpose. I was in the room waiting for

him when the telephone rang. I answered. It was some one who said he was—it sounded like Artie——"

"Artie the lawyer."

"He wanted to talk to father. I told him who I was. He said: 'For Heaven's sake, get word to Craig that——' He was speaking so rapidly and softly, as if he were in a hurry and afraid that he would be overheard—that Banson—Benson——"

"Bannister?"

"That was it; that Bannister was coming to kill you."

"Here?"

"He gave me the address. That was all I could remember distinctly; all I prayed not to forget."

"Where were you and your father?"

She named a hotel.

"How did Artie the lawyer know you were there?"

"Father has been in communication with him."

"About?"

"Your pardon. There's a man in San Pedro who told us about the boy who shot Beekman; said that we could get confirmation from this man."

Craig spoke softly and reverently. "Heaven bless you and your father for the greatest people in the world! I love you both so I'd die for you. Only, never has life been so precious to me, Joan; all sky, Joan, like the view from this window. Let me tell you now, while there's yet time. I've been counting on a pardon—just how I wasn't sure. But I have friends who believe in me, and there's a whole empire down in the Southwest that they're going to send me to, an empire to conquer, reconstruct. It's mostly sky, and rock, as yet. But in my mind I've seen it transformed. You and I—Joan, do you love me?"

"I—I——"

He knelt down in front of her. He took her hands.

She lowered her face like a bashful child. One of his own hands crept up her arm.

"Now," said he, "nothing can happen to me. I'm as safe as Achilles, and even the heel is immune. Hurry back to your hotel before your father has a chance to worry about you. Tell him what has happened, of course. Tell him that I shall hope to see him to-night, or to-morrow morning."

"You'll not come with me now?"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"This is the time, almost the hour, when I am to wipe out the rest of the debt in the red ledger."

"No, no! Come with me!"

"Joan!"

"But I'm frightened."

"You need not be. What have I just been telling you? Aren't you my guardian angel? Haven't you just put me on my guard?"

"But this Bannister!"

"Will be surprised."

"You know him?"

"Count Wolf, late of San Pedro."

"Count Wolf, of the red ledger?"

"The same."

"Daniel, let us call the old debts off."

"Joan!"

They had been standing in the twilight, the deepening twilight, lit ineffectually by the glimmer that came in from the hall and the last green glow of the west, where a single white star blazed. Craig drank in the poetry of the girl's presence here with him at an hour like this. They were like cave dwellers, with a cave far up a mountainside. Here in the heart of the big city the noises that reached them were hushed and small. The voices of the multitude and of the machines—trolleys and motors, trains and ships—

were but as the chirping of crickets and the booming of frogs.

Craig put out his hand, and the electric light was on. As if it also were in response to his touch, a door leading into an inner office opened and a strongly built young man appeared. He blinked at Craig and Miss Gracie.

"I beg your pardon," he began.

"That's all right, Smith," laughed Craig softly.

The man called Smith disappeared. Craig smiled at Joan.

"That ought to assure you," he said. "Mr. Smith is of the district attorney's staff. I have help at hand in case of emergency. But I am to do this myself—to give Courtney his big story——"

"Courtney?"

Craig explained. It was Courtney who had put these offices at his disposition. They were directly over the offices of Courtney's paper. A special stairway had even been cut from that inner room to the floor below.

"My trap," said Craig. "Let Wolf come. But you, Joan——"

"You mean that that bandit was coming to see you here, anyway?"

"Yes, and others."

"But he intends to kill you."

"He must have got wind of what was going on. He'll not kill me. But hurry, Joan."

"And leave you?"

"You must. I shan't be alone—not for long. Count Wolf, who has been going under the name of Bannister, was to meet Leamy here, with the idea of robbing him. Wolf expects to rob Leamy, Leamy expects to rob the supposed Bannister. Trick O'Ray's coming to crack this safe. Ben Jarvis comes to black-

mail me. But I've been working with the district attorney. Listen!"

In response to his abrupt command they both turned and looked in the direction of the door leading to the outer corridor. They heard the faint rasp of a key in the lock. Then, before either of them could move or utter a word, the door slowly opened.

CHAPTER XXV

GHOSTS

IT was as if the voice were a harbinger of the rather more ghostly things that were to follow. As a matter of fact, the voice was one that Craig recognized. The recognition brought dismay with it rather than fear—perhaps disgust rather than dismay. It was the voice of the ex-warden of San Pedro. It was followed by Green himself. He came into the room slowly. His eyes had never wavered from Craig, but he had also seen that a girl was there. Craig hadn't moved.

Said Green:

"Try anything this time, and a wild bullet may hit this little friend of yours."

That would hold him.

"What do you want?" asked Craig.

"What do I want?" And Green's voice was shaking with his pent-up emotion. "Oh, Heaven! Now, what do I want!"

"Don't!" cried Craig.

There was fear in his cry this time, all right, but it was fear for Joan. She had stepped between Craig and the big ex-warden as calmly as a mother would have stepped between a child and a vicious dog.

"Get back!" panted Green. "Or, by thunder——"

He stopped as he saw who it was. The rage and the triumph in his face took on an infusion of dirty mirth.

"What do you want?" Joan demanded in turn.

"A pretty howdy-do!" droned Green through his

beard. "You and this here con together, eh? Just as I suspected! Warden's gal! Highfalutin' society folks! Why, now I have got you to rights, both of you, and damn me if I wouldn't just as leave shoot one as t'other, or both—and good riddance. Stand aside."

"Green!"

The ex-warden gave a slight jerk. Craig's voice had snapped like a pistol shot.

"Hold up your hands," said Green.

"First, I'll remind you of your own daughter," said Craig, softly and rapidly, between closed teeth. "Have you forgotten about her?"

"You shut up. Are you goin' to resist arrest?"

"Would you like to see her again?"

"Shut up!"

"She's here."

"I'll show——"

There was no telling what Green would have done next. Those private dreams of his were dancing in his brain. He was asking himself if this wasn't "resisting arrest." Only, there was a witness—and such a confusing witness! Again, he knew himself to be somewhat unnerved by that surprising reference that Craig had made to a family secret. But surprise is dangerous to a man of Green's type—apt to startle the mad tiger of his nature into a premature leap.

"She's here," said Craig steadily.

Then, there was another ghostly voice—it must have sounded ghostly to Green, all right, to judge from the way he took it.

"Father!"

She came in from the middle office. Courtney had seen that she should be there, Green's lost daughter Amy, she who called herself "Mrs. Beekman."

Green had the look about him of one who has been surprised in the dark by a flash of light or an unex-

pected noise. He still held his weapon presented. He still kept his eyes on Craig. But he had heard that voice. The Lord only knows what memories it may have awakened!

"Amy!" he gasped.

Craig, watching his opportunity, and knowing that death was still, so to speak, an invisible onlooker in the room, ready to take a hand at any moment, stepped swiftly forward and in a flash secured the warden's weapon.

"You won't need it," said Craig.

But it is doubtful if the warden heard him. Green was looking at this apparition of his daughter, Amy —Mrs. Beekman. Almost any one would have found that lady ghostly, not to say ghastly—white-faced, unhealthy, stricken with her own tragic memories. She tried to smile at her father. Her flat breast heaved. Any one could see that a sob or a few tears would have been of the greatest relief to her, but neither came.

"How'd you git here?" asked Green.

Such is the language of real emotion.

"Mr. Courtney—he's the gentleman I've been working for—thought I ought to tell you——"

The ex-warden of San Pedro here got a fresh grip on himself. He turned from the pale girl roughly. Perhaps it was too much for him to see those twin dreams of his fading so rapidly. His voice was a throaty growl as he spoke to Craig:

"So you've dragged my daughter into this, too, have you? Thought to save yourself! I'll show you! I'll show you!" He spoke to his daughter. "And you! Stayed away from me all this time only to show up now to fight for this dirty crook! What do you mean by lettin' him use you? Hadn't you fallen low enough already—brought enough disgrace on me—you—you——"

No one else was speaking or trying to speak. Craig, with a dawning knowledge of what might have been on the way, himself was spellbound. So was Joan Gracie. She also may have guessed. Certainly the daughter of Samuel Green must have known. Only the father himself was altogether blind, altogether unsuspecting.

Through the door from the inner office came Artie the lawyer. Craig remembered certain hints that Courtney had dropped from time to time. And Artie was followed by a youth even more pallid than this sister of his. It was she who whispered his name.

"Brewster!"

Green echoed the name with his mouth open.

"Brewster!"

He slowly turned. Father and son were looking at each other, the father numbed, transfixed, the boy merely nervous and diffident.

"Hello, governor!"

The boy tried an assumption of nonchalance. He pulled himself together. He made a step forward briskly to where Green stood, ready to shake hands with him, ready to embrace him—do anything filial.

But whatever his intentions were they were to be deferred. He hadn't taken two steps before his wandering, rather embarrassed, furtive eyes found Craig. Craig had backed against a window, Joan at his side. All this was a very fast little drama, with something about it that neither the speech nor the action quite conveyed. Somehow, as an imaginative witness would have said, as if there were actors and elements there that were invisible, that were ghostly, the ghost, perhaps, of the murdered Beekman.

And there was something ghostly in the face of Daniel Craig. He looked at the boy Brewster, and the boy Brewster looked at him. There was no great difference in their ages, but suddenly it was as if

Brewster were shriveled and old, Craig towering. But Craig was towering with an odd mixture of both triumph and pity. He choked out a whisper:

"You don't have to tell!"

"What?"

It was a cry from the heart of Green, as if he were beginning to comprehend. Brewster was mute. He let his sister speak.

She told how she had met Mr. Beekman, and gave a flitting glimpse of their romance—he the handsome stranger coming to town on some local contracting job, and how he had sympathized with her. Said this pale, hollow-eyed girl: "He was the only man that ever understood me." And then the local job was done, and Mr. Beekman had gone over to the Stonehill construction work, and forgot his promises, and forgot to write to her, and everything.

"Why didn't you tell me?" queried Green hoarsely, through his beard.

"I was afraid of you," said the girl.

"When I tried to bring you up God-fearin'——"

"You always laughed whenever I cried——"

Green wasn't laughing now. He recalled what Craig had said about Green's never laughing again.

So Amy had confided her story to her brother, Brewster, and Brewster had conceived that he was acting as any man should when he filched one of his father's own revolvers——

"They might 'a' thought it was me," said Green, looking at Brewster.

The boy sniffed and worked his shoulders, meaning thereby to indicate that he would have looked out for that end of it all right. And Brewster went over to Stonehill merely intending to frighten Mr. Beekman and make him come back.

Green, shaken, as if emptied of his bigness and strength, turned to where Craig stood. At last Green

was seeing the story whole, putting into it those several things that Craig had said to him on occasion.

"And you knowed my boy done it?"

Craig nodded.

"Why—why——"

Said Courtney: "It looked like the hand of Providence."

It must have looked like Providence to Craig—some sort of divine intervention—when he saw entering the office just now from the same door by which Courtney had come, two men whom, of all the men in the world, he just then most desired to see. One of them was Colonel Bird, the district attorney. The other was Major Gracie. Old friends they were, and now brought together in a cause that had become vital to both of them. They had called to see Courtney, had learned that Courtney was here. His private secretary had seen that they found him without loss of time.

There was a momentary interruption when they came into the room. Gracie was surprised to see his daughter. She ran to greet him. Bird and Courtney exchanged a word.

But that other drama—the drama of the former warden of San Pedro and his family, a drama in which Craig had been destined to play so bitter a rôle—was tumbling forward, clumsily yet swiftly, of its own momentum, and would know no interference.

Green himself was as a man who has been stricken with paralysis of brain as well as body. He put out his hands as if he didn't see very well. His big back was bowed as if he were expectant of a lash. Then, suddenly, he tried to bully it through.

"It's all a frame-up—a lie," he proclaimed hoarsely.

His daughter Amy slowly and sadly—and, one would have said, accusingly—shook her head.

"You're tryin' to save a dirty convict," coughed Green.

"He saved me!" said Brewster, with a touch of the dramatic, as he pointed at Craig.

"But he put you up to it!" snarled Green.

"Yes, he did not!" said the boy, his voice going shrill with a touch of hysteria. "He tried to steer me right. But I shot Beekman!"

"Yes," said the girl, in her commonplace accents, "Brewster came back and told me what he had done, and then we both decided it would be better to run away——"

That was about all, except a confirmatory detail here and there from the boy, and from the girl, and from the ex-warden of San Pedro himself. Green had suffered a paralyzing shock, one perhaps destined to win him back his immortal soul. Green was beginning to heave. He shambled as he walked. He groped for a chair. He sat down in it. By and by he dropped his face into his hands. He was silent.

As if by degrees, and without the cognizance of the others in the office, the ex-warden's daughter and his derelict son joined him where he sat, thus forming a little family group of their own. Later the boy was to stand trial, and be acquitted. Almost any lawyer could have got him off; and Courtney had hired a good one.

But at this present moment, the others there in the office had divers things to think about. Major Gracie and his daughter had to have a word of explanation on their own account—how she happened to be there, where he had been. Artie the lawyer had reports to make to Courtney and Colonel Bird.

And, there for an interval, Craig was as if all alone. He had turned. He faced the sky. He had heard his innocence proven here in the presence of the only

friends he had on earth or cared to have. It made his own breast heave.

Then it was as if the strength of a storm had been confined in him, had become a mere potentiality of strength, as he turned from the window, and faced the others. He was sober. He felt a certain solemnity. He had a strange sense that this was some higher, better Daniel Craig who had now taken possession of himself—his mind and his voice.

"I am still Three Sevens," he said pleasantly.

"You are Daniel Craig," said Colonel Bird, with a combination of that pettiness and strength that characterized him.

"I still have a debt to pay," said Craig.

Here Courtney spoke up, almost as if an accusation had been brought against him:

"I don't know what you're talking about, Craig, old man; but if you refer to—why, confound it—he's helped us put the scoundrels on the run; hasn't he, colonel?"

Craig smiled. His smile took in Joan Gracie without singling her out, which might have been embarrassing. But of all those there, Joan was possibly the only one besides Craig who guessed the nature of the debt to which Craig referred. It was Major Gracie who spoke next:

"You're Daniel Craig, sir; and I have the honor to tell you so, officially."

Craig took time to think. Perhaps he was seeing wrong. Perhaps all debts were balanced. But there was no conviction in his mind too great for thought.

"I've got to finish what I started out to do," he said.

"Oh, you mean the plan to trap those crooks!" said Artie.

"Yes."

"Nothing doing."

"They got the tip?"

"Not about what you were going to do."

"But your own tip that Wolf was coming here to kill me?"

"That was because the Wolf was being trailed by a New York detective and was feeling ugly and thought you might have squealed."

"But the others?"

"Like the count himself. Captain Fleyenhall," said Artie, taking the rest of his audience into his confidence, "learned what Mr. Craig, and you, Mr. Courtney, and Colonel Bird, were planning to do here to-night. It was Fleyenhall's plan to nip your plan by arresting your men himself, downstairs, and thus turn the tables on you——"

"Clever," said Courtney.

"But not clever enough," said Artie. "Fleyenhall couldn't pull anything like that. He's nothing but a big, thick-headed cop. Every crook in town knew what he was up to the moment he called in his men."

"And you mean?" said Colonel Bird.

"The crooks have scattered."

"And our pet plan spoiled," said the colonel.

"Fleyenhall's also," said Courtney. "That's one satisfaction—in spoiling our plan—Craig's plan—they spoiled their own."

Craig had looked from one to the other. Wasn't that the spinner in his skull at work again?

But now Craig was looking altogether at Joan, and she was looking altogether at him. Let the others think what they would. She understood. Craig spoke again:

"Not the highest gift of Heaven will do me any good unless I've settled the account in full. Later on, I'll pay back the money that Courtney has advanced. There are other small debts here and there that I'll have to pay. But there are still these four men of

prey at large—Leamy and Count Wolf, Trick O'Ray and Ben Jarvis. I'll go and get them."

It was not with the voice of the old Craig, but with the voice of this newer Craig, that he spoke now as he turned to Courtney:

"You'll have your story, and you'll have it here!"

"You mean——"

"——that since my men haven't kept their appointment, I'll go out and fetch them."

"Can you?"

"I will."

"They may be gone."

"I know where."

"It's now six o'clock."

"I'll have the last of them here—by midnight!"

Craig heard himself saying this. What was he promising? It wasn't a promise. It was a prophecy.

He turned to Colonel Bird.

"Now that the police aren't likely to interfere——"

"I'll put the screws to them if they try it," said the district attorney. "What with Artie's affidavit."

Craig had a quick smile for Artie. He completed what he had to say to Colonel Bird:

"You may have your own detectives there in the back room, as we originally planned——"

All this as if there was some higher intelligence using his voice, using his brain, as there unquestionably was, but, nevertheless and always, this higher intelligence his very own.

It was a little vision of Joan as he had last seen her—hands clasped, a light in her eyes—that stood out in the jumble of other visions that were with him as he left the room. He comprehended the emotion of hers, a commingling of fear and faith, of tenderness and awe. And he comprehended all this as if they were already one—as if they already had been

married—as possibly they had in the alchemy of souls.

He went down in the elevator and noticed nothing and heard no sound not necessary to what lay ahead of him. His concentration was perfect, as in the case of a man possessed. He called a taxi, gave an address.

CHAPTER XXVI

RIGHT AND LEFT

THERE had been a shiver and a scamper in that nether world of which Craig for a period had been the unwilling "Napoleon." There was no doubt about that. The word had been passed: "Lay low." There was nothing new about this. Every now and then some such warning went out—following some big crime, preceding some special investigation, and especially around election time. But to a number of the denizens of this underworld had the signal come with special violence—particularly to those who had recently been in touch with Three Sevens.

Count Wolf, with the nagging New York detectives on his trail, had suddenly decided to put over his designs of vengeance on the man he believed had betrayed him. Taylor Leamy suddenly wished he were back in Cincinnati.

When the district attorney and the police got together for a real clean-up, the millstones were turning—grinding. It was "Good night!" to the weevils in the wheat.

Especially disquieting was that report that Three Sevens had been taken and, in exchange for benefits, present and to come, had decided to tell all that he knew. No one knew where this rumor originated. No one knew how much it contained of truth. But there it was, with a quality about it to furnish a shiver and a scamper even to those who had believed themselves to be most immune.

It was the very fact that so little was known about Three Sevens, himself, apart from that amazing delivery he had put over in San Pedro, that this new rumor concerning Craig assumed the quality it did. No one knew what he knew and what he didn't know. A good deal was taken for granted. Here was a man who could bargain with not only the police, but the finicky and uncompromising district attorney.

"You can tell it to the whole world," said Trick O'Ray, "I ain't scared of him, nor no other stiff."

"It ain't no disgrace to lay low for a while, though, Tricky," grinned Jarvis.

Jarvis knew that Trick was talking for the benefit of Violet rather than for the mere enunciation of pure truth.

"The first chance I gets," said Trick, "I put him in the morgue."

Jarvis laughed genially.

He was perfectly willing to have Trick try. He was perfectly willing to have almost anything happen to Tricky, too. He was, at any time, especially now, with Violet's not ungraceful shape occupying so much of his physical and mental vision.

There was nothing dark and mysterious about this lair of the well-known pair. It was just an ordinary little flat, far out in the suburbs. There was even a touch of home about it. There was a red tablecloth on the table at which the men sat. On this the lighted lamp shone warmly. In the corner stood the cook stove radiating heat and sausage smells, and the woman at the side of it might have been the bride of any well-paid workman. Well-paid workmen were what Trick and Jarvis might have been—if one didn't examine their soft hands, look too long at the inner hardness of their faces.

But, in general, they were very human—Jarvis, the

man of the world, and the superior of the two, listening tolerantly to an inferior whom he secretly intends to dupe.

"Why didn't you do it the last time you seen him?" demanded Violet, with a touch of disdain.

Secretly, she also was dreaming of romance, not of the romance that was in Ben Jarvis' thought. Something more splendid by far. Once, not so long ago, she had thought of forsaking Trick for Ben. But no more! No, there was another. She thought of him now as she stood there frying sausages, her thoughts skyrocketing—as they had done more or less ever since she had met him—Three Sevens himself!

Why not?

She could recall every moment of their meeting, from the first instant that she had seen him. What a thrill! Had she thrilled him like that? Two fortune tellers and a trance medium had thus far assured her that she had. And hadn't he looked her in the eyes, and spoken to her as if she were a lady, and held her hand the shred of a century when they parted?

"I wasn't born for this," said Violet to herself as she fried the sausage for the two thieves at the table, "I was born for something better. My Gawd, I could love him so!"

She emptied the sausages into a plate and put this on the red tablecloth. She reached down a loaf of bread from a shelf and added this to the repast. Her ideas of domestic science were primitive. Her thoughts were elsewhere.

Trick had taken a knife from his pocket. He opened this, showed he was housebroken by wiping it on the tablecloth, then cut himself a hunk of bread. He parted this and thrust a piece of the hot sausage into the opening with the point of his knife. On his monkeylike face had come a banquet look.

"Git us some coffee," he commanded.

"What's the matter with a can of suds?" Ben asked.

Ben had also helped himself. He had broken off a piece of bread and folded this over into a sort of tongs with which he secured his meat.

Not like this had Three Sevens eaten, Violet reflected. He had joined her and Trick and Ben in the rear room of a saloon which was also a restaurant of sorts, and they had regaled themselves together. She herself had been scarcely able to eat—pretending she had a headache. It was so she could watch Three Sevens, be ready to meet his eye whenever he should chance to look at her. And he had looked at her.

"Sure, a scuttle o' suds," said Trick.

Trick was in a quiver of eagerness. His mouth was full. He was eating with a sort of ferocious delight.

Ben was but little less absorbed, but he had a glance for the girl as she took a tin bucket from the window sill. She went out of the little flat without a word.

Neither of them was ever to see her again.

Craig saw her, at the bottom of the dark stairs, three flights down. He spoke to her.

"Hello, Violet——" the merest whisper.

She suppressed a cry. Then Craig was speaking to her rapidly.

"Keep right on going, but give me the key to the flat. You can give me the bucket, too, if you want to."

"Where——" she began, stifled.

"You've got a brother in Waukegan."

"How did you know?"

"I found out."

"Was it—did you——"

"Think about you? Yes. Go to him. Later, go West."

"What's the matter? What are you going to do? Will I——"

"Violet, do what I tell you, now! Agreed?"

He got her affirmative without a word from her. She had passed him a key. There was a shyness and a confidingness about her, somehow, and all of a sudden, that made it seem to Craig that he was talking to a little child—as if, here in this somber and also sinister hall, a kindly fate had moved the years back for Violet and made her a child again.

It was in that sort of a spirit that Craig put his hands on Violet's shoulders and kissed her on the forehead. It was a fraternal kiss.

That was their leave taking. And that was the sum and climax of Violet's romance. After all, many a woman and man has had to be satisfied with less.

Craig didn't look back of him. He didn't have to. He had that species of omniscience—small and human, but none the less a variety of omniscience itself—that permitted him to know that Violet had fled away through the night, to fairer fields and happier, he hoped.

With a thought like that he came to the door of the flat where the two fugitives gorged and waited for their beer. Craig didn't need the key. He had the signal that would have caused them to open. But it would be easier with the key. He smiled as he fitted the key to the lock.

He was smiling as he pushed the door open. He was smiling still as the silence fell. He smiled because he was thinking of Violet, and then of what old Eddie Yarmouth used to say:

" 'Tis a thought that'll bring you luck."

Eddie was right. The surprise was perfect. Craig spoke softly.

"How'll you ride?" he asked. "Taxi—or an ambulance?"

There were a dozen places in any one of which Taylor Leamy might have sought refuge, and all of these Craig had visited while the night was still young, as Taylor Leamy himself was to discover. And in each one of these Craig had left an impression that was at once ensnaring and disquieting.

Leamy, that night, had eaten his dinner in a quiet little restaurant back of a brewery. He was almost the only customer in the place. The quiet had appealed to him. Also, it had given him time to reflect.

Getting a little old, a little fat, a little soft. No, it wouldn't do for him to make any more false plays. The idea of prison nauseated him—the hardness, the violence, the ugliness of everything. He hoped that Craig would prosper. Perhaps he could get as much as ten—as much as twenty—thousand dollars out of Craig. For Craig also must hate prison. But what had been the meaning of that tip he had got from Bender to lay low, let Craig alone for a while?

Bender was a shyster lawyer. In times past, Leamy had paid Bender thousands of dollars. Was Bender now giving him a straight tip? Or had Bender accepted a fee from Craig himself?

The message had come to Leamy at his lodging house, a quiet place, kept by a respectable widow.

He had taken to living much at night, since his return to Chicago, sleeping mostly in the daytime. It wouldn't do for him to stumble into the wrong sort of person and get recognized. And yet he couldn't be too cautious, either. His funds were running low. Now, if he could only blackmail Craig out of a comfortable sum!

The waiter who had served him hastily approached from the other end of the hall.

"Beg pardon," said the waiter. "Are you Mr. Finch?"

It was the name that Leamy had adopted since his return. He was Finch to Three Sevens.

"Yes," he said cautiously. "I'm Mr. Finch."

"Just before you came in," said the waiter, "a gentleman gave me this card for you. I almost forgot."

Leamy took the card. It was a plain card. There was a message written on it as follows:

Y 630
Report before midnight.
3777

Leamy lingered a little longer picking his teeth. He made of it an elaborate operation. But all the time that he was doing this he could feel the blood draining back to his heart and leaving something of a weight and a coldness there. He remembered that "Y630." How well he remembered it—his own private mark on the books of San Pedro!

He would have to get rid of this feeling. So he told himself when he was out in the street. He went to a small political club of the neighborhood where he had been wont to slay a few of his heavy hours with a game of billiards. And he played there now, indifferently, albeit with a passion of forced attention, until a certain marker, just back from an errand, noticed him and handed him a card:

Y 630

Heigh-o! He pocketed the card, put up his cue.

Leamy yawned. All right, he was willing to let it go at that. A man of his age appreciated a good

night's sleep. He paid his reckoning. He thought with appreciation of the quiet room that was awaiting him at the widow's house.

A little later he let himself in with a pass-key. The hall of the widow's house was dimly lighted. Leamy started for the stairs. He stopped short.

Odd, but there for a moment he was almost certain that the woman who stood there in front of him was a certain other widow who had once confronted him, telling him that he had robbed her of her last cent. Then Leamy pulled himself together. It was no one but his landlady.

"Goodness, Mrs. Travis," he exclaimed, with a touch of the jocular, "you almost frightened me."

"Maybe it was because I was frightened myself," said Mrs. Travis.

She was a woman who had lost all sense of humor if she had ever possessed any.

"I should have rung the bell," said Leamy.

"It wasn't that," said she. "It was the gentleman who was just here looking for you. He was a fine-looking gentleman, but there was something in his face I can't forget."

Leamy felt a thin, fine quiver in his spine.

"To see me? What did he want?"

"He didn't say. He said you'd know. He said: "Tell him Three Sevens said—what does that mean?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Mrs. Travis."

"But he said you would. He said: 'Tell him Three Sevens orders him to come to his office, without fail, before midnight.'"

"Oh, yes," said Leamy, "I remember, now. It's something about our lodge." And Leamy turned and left the house. He was in need of air. As a matter of fact he had been in need of air—although he hadn't recognized the necessity at once—ever since Mrs. Travis had reminded him of that other widow.

It was an hour later before Leamy succeeded in getting Bender, the shyster lawyer, on the telephone. Bender, it appeared, had been dining with friends and was in a jovial mood.

"What did you mean by that message?" Leamy asked, as soon as he had established his identity.

"See you to-morrow."

"Listen," said Leamy passionately. "I've been standing here in the stuffy telephone booth for an hour——"

"—'s what I'm telling you——"

"Bender, let me see you to-night."

"See you to-morrow."

Leamy caught the strain of music.

"Listen, Ike! Three Sevens——"

For the first time since the attempted conversation began, Bender's voice came clear and cold. It was a question:

"Did you ever hear of some one listening in?"

There was a rasping click, and Leamy knew that Bender had "hung up."

"I'll do what Three Sevens said," Leamy agreed with himself. "After all, there was that deal he was going to let me in on. I was to have seen him at six. Bender steered me off."

Bender was a shyster. On the other hand it was perfectly true that Bender had valuable relations with the police and certain magistrates. And Leamy hesitated after he had signaled the car that would have carried him past the Courtney Building. For a second the conductor was frowning at Leamy. Then the conductor jerked his bell and the car rumbled on.

It was another car he took, and one that went in the opposite direction an hour or so later, and in that hour the coldness and the weight about Leamy's heart had grown like an icicle under a glacial drip. Two more of those cards had been added to his collection

now. One he had picked up at the Sagamore Buffet, where the bartender was an old and trusted friend of his, and the bartender had looked at him with pity. The other he had picked up at the Hotel Columbine.

Leamy rode and rode, until he noticed how a man who stood beside the motorman kept staring back at him. Then Leamy got off and found that he was in a part of the city that was unfamiliar to him.

He was near a stream of water. He saw the dancing reflections of it through blackness. And there came to him a peculiar jolt of consciousness that there may have been a bit of truth in that death notice of Taylor Leamy he had read, after all; and that this shimmering dark water was what he had come to find.

CHAPTER XXVII

TIGERS' DEN

JUST eleven, by the illuminated dial of some obscure factory, when Leamy raised stricken eyes for a look about him. Still time! But he was getting old, getting a trifle fat and soft. The water beckoned.

"Just eleven," said Craig to himself, as he looked at that same dial from the north. "Still time."

But his thought was of Count Wolf, and he regretted the time that he had given to Leamy thus far. Not that he had given very much. After all, Leamy had been incidental to his search for Wolf. It was Wolf who was going to require a test of strength. Wolf also he had traced from lair to lair—tireless, unceasing, with the look and the feel about him that he had brought away from the office where, in the presence of all the world he and Joan Gracie had plighted themselves as surely as if they had written out their troth on white parchment.

The taxi sped. The eleven o'clock dial was left behind. Over the tops of the houses Craig saw the stars, quiet, reassuring. They recalled other nights. But this was the night of nights. He breathed deep.

There had been one interrupton in Craig's search for the master sinner who went by the name of Count Wolf. That was after Craig had learned that the count was at Madame Marebello's. A ball, if you please! That was the count's style! A ball for the count on the eve of Waterloo. Or was it Waterloo?

Craig had gone to his hotel and decked himself in his finest—had shaved himself for the second time this

day, manicured himself and made himself immaculate in every respect, nor counted the precious minutes lost that he had devoted to this end.

For, all the time that he was doing it he was telling himself that if, peradventure, he should have to die it would be well to die clean. It was odd how that thought of death kept beating at the shutter of his mind, like Poe's *Raven*. And finally, as had the poet, so Craig had thrown the shutter open, let the sable bird come in. For, after all, what was there so terrible about death? He could imagine a thousand things worse.

Just five minutes after eleven, and the taxi that had brought Craig from the center of the city into this quiet and eminently respectable street, had stopped before an imposing house surrounded by an imposing garden. The house was shuttered. For all except the front door it was dark. For all except a muted hum of music and laughter it was silent.

Craig directed his chauffeur into an alleyway at the side of the garden. He was grateful now for the presence of this man, a detective lent him by his friend, Colonel Bird.

But no raven was croaking in Craig's mind as he mounted the Marebello steps. The power was still in him, plus a certain knowledge that whatever should happen to him, that thing would not be bad.

He didn't have to ring the bell. A butler saw him coming, opened the door. That was a point about this house. No raiding party of police would ever have to scandalize this neighborhood by chopping down the outer door. Inside—if it ever came to that—there would have to be some chopping, perhaps. For, if reports were to be believed, the stately rooms and cozy alcoves of the Marebello's house concealed a labyrinth.

Said the butler:

"Whom shall I announce?"

Said Craig:

"The gentleman from Frisco."

Craig was glad that he had the password right. They changed the password rather frequently in houses where Count Wolf was an honored guest. He heard the door close behind him with a metallic click. The butler was helping him off with his coat. A few moments later he was saluting his hostess.

She was a tall woman, very dark, very richly colored—with a color that was all her own. Craig smiled at her. But his smile was of the lips only.

"This is indeed a pleasure," said the Marebello.

Her voice was a rich and vibrant contralto, very soft, very musical. It had a caressing touch about it like the hand that the lady placed on Craig's arm.

"The pleasure is mine," said Craig.

It was easier to lie when the time-worn old phrases of polite speech were used.

"I was afraid that you had forgotten me."

"No man could ever forget you," said Craig truthfully, this time. "You are very beautiful."

It was a phrase that the Marebello must have heard ten thousand times, but there was a soberness about Craig as he said it that gave the familiar words a quality of freshness.

"You're a charming boy," she retorted meltingly.

"You are so beautiful," said Craig softly, "that I'm going to tell you something right now before I fall under your spell."

"You almost frighten me."

"You may well be frightened," said Craig, with that odd sobriety of his, "but not of me."

They had been standing in the broad hall. From an adjacent room there came the sound of an orchestra creeping and strumming into the first bars of an ex-

otic, voluptuous dance, a babble of voices, the popping of a champagne cork.

"What do you mean?" the woman asked, with an accent of alarm, genuine this time, even if it was subdued.

Craig whispered the rest:

"It's what I say—or murder!"

He made it brutal. He knew where he was. He was a trainer in the tiger den. He had shown the red-hot iron.

The woman didn't flinch. She had an excellent nerve. No one perhaps had a wider experience with the varieties of passion. In her world the raw and the primitive were never covered with more than a thin veneer. She knew the value of keeping her head. On the other hand, she must have known that here was a crisis where there was no time to be lost. And, in a way, she was prepared for meeting violence with violence. That butler who had helped Craig off with his coat was a heavyweight slugger. There were other servants in the house like that. There were a number of guests who would have been equally efficient in putting a man to sleep.

"You forget where you are," she said.

"Listen closely," said Craig pleasantly and softly. "For you, it's peace or war."

"What do you want?"

"I've come to get Count Wolf."

"Can't you wait 'til he leaves?"

"No."

"You will ruin me."

"No, I won't. I'll tell him to come away with me."

"He'll kill you."

"Do you know who I am?"

She gave him a melting look, still tried to argue. "Be a nice boy. Why can't we all be friends?"

"All I ask of you," said Craig steadily, "is no interference—from your servants or your guests. The D. A.'s office and the police know where I am. They're waiting for me. Got that?"

"Yes."

"And they're waiting for Wolf."

Craig was alone as he strolled into the big room where the dancers were. There were a dozen couples on the floor. There were other couples and groups about the walls. It was an ornate room, brilliantly lighted. There was nothing much to differentiate it from any private ballroom; nor, for that matter, was there anything superficial to differentiate these guests from the guests, say, at some large but intimate house party. The girls were attractive. Most of the men were quiet.

Men only interested Craig as he looked about him. He saw the one man he was looking for. Count Wolf stood with a small party, men and women, almost opposite the broad double doors by which Craig entered. Almost at the same instant Count Wolf must have seen Craig.

Craig was fair. The count was dark. Craig was shaven to the tinted marble of his face. The count wore the pointed black beard that had become his treasure and his pride, as well as his principal disguise, since quitting San Pedro. Both Craig and the count were supple, straight, and strong. If it came to a physical encounter, all other things equal, it would be a pretty guess as to which might win.

But Craig, from the first, had resolved that there should be no physical encounter—not if he could help it—not in the usual sense. He was still in the tiger den. He knew that. It would be folly to take his chances with fang and claw.

His entrance had attracted notice. He was aware

of this. It was the great Three Sevens who stepped across the room.

Craig never wavered. He stepped up to Count Wolf and squared himself in front of the count. Craig said:

"So there you are, you cur!"

He lifted his open hand. He gave the count a smart slap—not very hard, but swift.

The count let out a snarl. But the attack had been so swift, so surprising, so completely devoid of anything like fear or hesitation, that the count was defeated while Craig's fingers were still against his cheek.

Craig had something in him that the count didn't understand, that was as much a mystery to him as the power of an animal trainer is mysterious to a slinking, but deadly, black panther. Perhaps the black panther says to itself in its own way: "I am deadly. I can kill. But here is one creature who ignores that fact. What has he got that is greater?" Had there been a thought like that in the count's mind, as there was, most likely, Craig could have made a satisfactory answer.

Right then and there, Craig was answering some such problem for himself. He had all the power of civilization back of him. The count didn't.

There had been a swift recoil, a tensing of nerves and muscles. It was a tension not only of the count, but of those who had been with him—a youth with a snout like a boar, a man of uncertain age who in the passing fancy of the moment might have been a polar bear. The women were drawn back—coiling, one would have said, like cobras and pythons.

There came an added touch to the scene.

The orchestra was not very far away. A moment ago the orchestra had been playing its music for this

human menagerie. There was a jangling succession of discords. The music stopped.

"You talk of killing me," said Craig. His voice was so cold and thin he could hardly recognize it as his own. He looked about him, and took his time about it, but not too much time. "I've come to get this man," he explained. He snapped his eyes back on the count. "Come on with me. Get out of here. Or I'll kick you out."

"You'll answer for this," said the count.

But his threat was a mockery. He knew it was a mockery. The trouble was that the count couldn't think—couldn't think at all except about that thing that Craig had that the count himself couldn't understand. After all, it's the mystery that counts—mystery that has always frightened both animals and men, and made the old kings and gods what they were.

"Outside," said Craig, and he stood aside.

The count was like a man in a vacuum, only it was not mere air that had been pumped away from him; it was that finer thing that all men breathe when in the society of their fellows—sympathy, accord. The count was aware that this crowd, suddenly, was not "with him." He was a man who had just had his face slapped. And the crowd also was in the presence of this something that it couldn't understand—a greater strength, a greater skill, a greater fame.

The count drew himself up. He made a last play for dignity.

"We'll settle this outside," he said, and started for the door.

But Craig was watchful. His eyes, including the third eye in the top of his head, were everywhere. He was as strong and yet as delicate as a seismograph, ready to note the slightest vibration of the unsettled world about him.

He was watchful in the hall, while that heavy-shouldered, light-handed butler was helping the count into his things, then Craig himself. In the midst of it all, Craig caught an impression of the Marebello smiling at him tropically, from the shadow of the stairs, whereupon he thanked God that he was putting this place back of him forever.

And then, the moment that he and the count were on the steps, and the door clanging back of them like the bronze gates of hell, Craig seized the count in such a crushing grip that the count believed—must have believed—that his end was at hand.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TWELVE

BUT all Craig wanted to do was to get a hold on the count that the count couldn't break. Then he was running his prisoner off through the dark garden in the direction of the alley where the taxi was waiting. There Craig and the chauffeur searched the count, not as thoroughly as they should have done, and handcuffed him, not as carefully as they should have done.

There was a dial on the front of the cab—eleven thirty. The chauffeur was speeding. Craig, with the black mass of the count at his side, watched the dial, watched the count, watched the flickering lights and shadows. He was like a man who had been under water, was under water still, but who feels himself rushing up to air and safety.

He sought to disregard that recurrent whisper:

"Not yet! Not yet!"

It was a whisper that must have been making itself heard back there in the offices of the Courtney Building whither Craig had already sped with two other prisoners, Trick O'Ray and Ben Jarvis. They were still there, guarded by half a dozen detectives from Colonel Bird's office.

It was in the front office where the whisper must have been heard. There Colonel Bird himself sat in apparently complacent converse with his friend, Major Gracie, the volunteer warden of San Pedro. Richard Courtney was with them. At Courtney's orders, the

first edition of a great newspaper had gone to press with no hint of the big story that would yet startle the world on the following morning.

"The story's big enough to make a sensation now," said Courtney, satisfied.

And he used his unusual powers to make himself agreeable to Major Gracie's daughter, chiefly on Craig's account. For Courtney felt grateful to Craig, as a man feels grateful to any one who has come up to personal expectations after years of disillusionment.

"He's a great man," said Courtney softly. "He'll make his mark in the world."

Joan smiled.

From the window where she stood she also watched a dial—a lighted dial that rode like a yellow moon over the roofs of some adjacent buildings. The dial read eleven thirty. From the street—far, far down—there came the tinkle and roar of traffic. Somewhere in this human tide there was a swimmer battling for his life. His life was her own. So Joan Gracie felt.

She could smile. She could talk a little. She could act as if nothing mattered very much, as if she were possessed of a pleasant assurance.

Then, through her reverie, she heard an announcement:

"He's drowned!"

There filmed a blackness across her eyes. It seemed an age before she got the rest of the message. No, it wasn't her own swimmer who was drowned. Far over in another part of the city a night watchman had seen a man throw himself from a bridge. This was the man who was drowned. The news had been telephoned in to Courtney from a precinct station by one of his own reporters.

The drowned man was Taylor Leamy. There followed an odd detail about certain cards that had been found in Leamy's possession:

Y 630
Report before midnight
3777

Major Gracie could interpret that. He knew what those numbers signified. Then they all knew the purport of the message contained in the rest of the writing. It was Craig who had ordered Leamy to report. Leamy had preferred to report to his Maker instead.

They talked about that announcement of Leamy's death in San Francisco, of his having been drowned then and there. Was it this that finally brought Leamy to the very fate he had imagined? Or was it just fright? Anyway, Leamy was a debt which no longer existed on that red balance sheet Craig had referred to.

But Joan hoped that Craig would come. Her soul was telling her that he would appear with that last and most dangerous prisoner of all. She had read that look in Craig's eyes, and the quality of his voice, and the way he had carried himself, better than any one else. He was the Daniel of judgment and prophecy. No defeat, no misfortune, could befall him.

But as the slow hands on the dial crept around toward midnight, that whisper would repeat itself:

"Not yet! Not yet!"

There sounded a chime of bells from somewhere. There followed what seemed to be a long period. Then another bell, very slow and ponderous, began to strike twelve.

It was then that the thing happened—the thing they had all been waiting for. Out in the hall there had come the peculiar hum and click that meant the stopping of an elevator at his floor, a medley of voices, a tramp of feet.

The door of the office was open. The distance from this door to the elevators was not great. But the signal of those preliminary sounds had been sufficient to bring every one up out of the tangle of small interests into this dominating theme that had been in the minds of all of them.

"It's he."

"It's Craig!"

Instantly, every one by a sort of telepathy, or a sort of premature blossoming of hopes and expectations, knew that Craig was bringing a prisoner with him.

Joan Gracie had been the last to run to the door, although her interest had been the greatest. As a matter of fact, she was all but overcome. That period of suspense, following as it did on such other killing excitement, had been all but too much for her.

Then, there she was at the door, looking out into the hallway, all eyes, and yet scarcely able to see at all. What she did see was as if in a series of dark flashes, more like the figments of hallucination rather than anything real.

There was Craig, sure enough. And with him was Count Wolf. She remembered Count Wolf from that never-to-be-forgotten look he had given her back there in the office of San Pedro on the day of the great delivery.

She saw that the count was handcuffed. Then, confusion.

The count had made a violent movement. He had not only wrenched himself free. By some amazing trick of suppleness and strength he had succeeded in

getting himself free from those fine, strong shackles on his wrists.

Joan saw the count strike this way and that. She heard an imprecation. Then the count was running back toward the elevators. And Craig was after him.

The elevator was gone. The steel door that guarded the shaft was just sliding shut. The count thrust this back. He plunged into the shaft—eighteen stories deep.

Joan's heart stood still. Craig also had taken that leap.

Both Craig and the count had landed on the top of the elevator car that had just brought them up. The eighteenth floor was the top floor of the Courtney Building. Now the car had started down again. Did the man who ran the car hear that double thud on the top of the cage? It seemed so. A little further jolt on the lever, and away the car was dropping down, dizzily swift.

As Craig landed on top of the elevator cage, there was a shout above him. That was a shout from his friends. The shout was twisted into a whine, the car was dropping so fast.

There was a great chain attached to the top of the car. It was shiny in spots, although mostly coated with oil or graphite, possibly both.

"Cling to me," said the chain.

How far had they fallen? What had happened to the count? But there, for the first few seconds, the roar from the deeper consciousness smothered every other voice: "Save yourself!" The floors went past, a smear of shadows, of flicking lights, swept up by a hot wind stifled in dust and oil.

There was a soft thud of a sickening suddenness, and the car had slackened, had stopped.

Then a black shape squirmed up out of the red darkness and there was Count Wolf again. The

count also had escaped serious injury. He must have. He struck a blow at Craig. Craig had been wavering, dazed. The blow acted upon him like a deluge of cold water. So the game wasn't lost, after all?

He clutched the Wolf, and there for a nameless period of time they swayed against the chain. Somewhere a bell shrilled. There was a metallic clang. The platform jerked upward. Both Craig and the Wolf knew what that meant, although neither of them was capable of speech. The car was going up again. How far? To the top? There was a huge wheel up there round which the chain sped as swift and silent as light. Was it to be the destiny of one or both of them to be crushed against the wheel?

There was no speech between Craig and the count—no speech requiring breath—only the silent and far more eloquent speech of their eyes. Their eyes were close. Their eyes were as dark and deep as this endless tunnel stood up between heaven and earth.

Craig clung to the Wolf, the Wolf clung to Craig. Both clung to the chain that had already lacerated them and saved them.

The lights flashed down. In one respect the situation was simplified. At this hour of the night only this one car was running. And Craig remembered now. He had noticed when he and the count had come up in the car but a little while ago that the runner was old and a little deaf.

Ah, when the car came to the floor where his friends were! It was they who had signaled for the car to come back. Craig laughed, or thought he did. His soul laughed as if his soul knew that it was beyond hurt whatever happened to its enemy, his body. Those friends would be seeing him now a crushed object—a thing—at the bottom of the well five hundred feet down.

"Joan! Joan! For your sake!"

A cry from his heart, that. He gripped the count tighter, brought the smudge of the count's face against the steel chain, for the count kept prodding him with something sharp—up against his ribs—was trying to cut him.

They went to their knees in a heap.

The car had stopped. And, there for a moment, Craig clung to the top of the car with iron hooks that had been his fingers. For the count was trying to thrust him over and down, and Craig didn't want to go. He didn't want the fight to end.

He caught a flashing view of the depth, as down an endless, vanishing tunnel, ribbed with light.

To fall through that, drop through it, spinning, clutching at the fleeting light, grasping at shadows that sped! Ah, no! Ah, no! Better to end it here!

In the midst of cries that he did not understand, he had twisted himself up, caught the count about the waist, jerked, tugged, told him—or thought to tell him: "You go first!"

But the Wolf kicked as with a hoof of flint, then leaped.

He had sprung to the grating at the side of the car. This was like a fence of steel pickets running from ceiling to floor, ornamental and close set, shutting off the elevator well from the hallway landing. In this fence, or grille, there were perhaps a dozen doors or gates, one for each elevator.

Craig also leaped, although he was troubled by the knowledge of a certain weakness. This was no time to show weakness, though. Let nerve supply any strength that was lacking. Who was this Count Wolf? A blackleg! A man whose face he had slapped. Craig caught the bars and clung.

Where were those who shouted so? What were they saying? There was no occasion for excitement.

He saw the count lift the lever of a gate, slip through.

As the count turned to thrust the gate shut, Craig had an arm through. He followed his arm, while the count struck and struck again. But Craig refused to go back. Ah, no! He wouldn't go down that elevator shaft alone. Too far! Too lonely! No one to meet him at the journey's end.

Ah, there were those who had shouted. A rush of figures. But now the count was fleeing toward the stairway, the narrow, crooked stairway of stone and steel, never used except by postmen and scrubwomen, that squared down at one end of the hall beyond the battery of elevators.

Craig caught the count at the head of this.

"You got away once—twice—thrice! Now, never again!"

The thought was Craig's. For a moment they were like dancers in the circus—high up on a rope—balancing—death pulling one way, life the other.

They went down with a rush.

When his friends found Craig, he was three flights down, and apparently unhurt. They thought he was unhurt. They thought that Count Wolf was dead. For Craig was standing up, with the count in his arms, and had started back with him for the office on the upper floor. And Craig smiled.

His clothes were in disarray. His face was white —all the whiter from the contrast of his skin with a smear of oil and blood from temple to chin.

"I'll carry him," said Craig. "He's my prisoner. The red ledger is—the red ledger—is——"

Courtney and Major Gracie started to take the prisoner from the captor's arms. But they dropped the prisoner as Craig reeled around against the railing of the stairway, stood there panting, smiling still. Joan Gracie, appearing like a white shadow to Craig,

spoke with a voice that sounded to him like a brook running over pebbles in a woody solitude:

"Quick! He's hurt!"

Well, that was good enough for Craig. Some final thread of resolution snapped. He went to sleep.

There were other white shadows for Craig. He had come into a world that was mostly of white shadows. It appeared that, apart from other hurts, Count Wolf had managed to cut him rather severely with a knife—a small knife, fortunately; although very sharp. One of Craig's sides, as a matter of fact, was pretty well ribboned to the bone. But nothing too serious, for a constitution like his—clean blood, a good family history, no doubt.

Only, there was one night when Craig himself believed that he had opened his eyes on the white dawn of the Big Sleep. Everything white. He was in the hospital then, and didn't know it. No shape, no shadow except the one big white shadow which enveloped him physically and mentally—and spiritually, too, for he felt immeasurably clean.

With perfect peace he thought of all that he had been through. His conscience was clear. That dark and scarlet world through which he had passed had been a hard master to him, but he had worked out his bond, was a freeman. There had been a red ledger. The red ledger was no more.

But, with thought of the red ledger, there crept into this white heaven in which Craig found himself a glint of poignant yearning, a sense of loss, a loneliness and a nostalgia that was beyond endurance.

He knew that he was weak. He knew that it was wrong. But he just couldn't help it. That was all.

"Let me go back—go back!"

As if in response to his cry, a cool softness descended on his forehead. The white shadow took on

color and became infused with lines and substance, evidently in response to the simple magic of turning on the light, and he found himself looking up into the face of Joan Gracie.

"Joan," he whispered.

"Yes, Daniel."

"Where am I?"

"You're in a hospital—a private hospital—one of the best."

"And you are really here?"

"I came to see how you were getting on. The nurse stepped out for a moment, left me in charge."

Craig's breast rose and fell.

"You may talk a very little," said Joan. "Tell me what was bothering you just now. Maybe you'll be relieved."

Craig told her.

"I thought," he said, "that I had died and gone to heaven, but when I looked for you and found that you weren't there——"

He was still under the effects of his recent fright. He reached up and got Joan's hand. He brought it to his lips and held it there.

THE END

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